

***WILLIAM EWART HART***



**A FORGOTTEN  
FIRST**

***KEITH WHITE***

## **The Author:**

Keith White was born in Sydney in 1926, and the 1930s fuelled his lifelong interest in aviation history. He joined the RAAF in April 1944 and, with pilot training not available, he chose gunnery training and was posted to B-24 Liberator as a ball turret gunner. His units operated in New Guinea and from Australia. Keith stayed with the same crew until the war ended. He then qualified as an accountant and spent most of his working life in the appliance industry. Keith retired from this in 1985 and then worked as volunteer, including 9 years with the Australian Aviation Museum at Bankstown. He joined the Aviation Historical Society of Australia N.S.W. (AHSA) in 1990, was soon appointed to the Committee, and was Treasurer from 1995 to 2003 and again from 2009 to 2010. He has studied the life and times of pioneering aviator William Ewart Hart for last three decades.

Vale – Ronald “Keith” WHITE died 8 October 2018 late of Concord, NSW.  
“They shall mount up with wings like eagles” (Isaiah 40:31)

It was Keith’s wish to have his book, about Aviator Billy Hart, to be publish. Also, he qualified that his book was to be cost free to all those who enjoy the history of Aviation.



Keith White at Hart Field. This field is located in Russell Street, Emu Heights, N.S.W. It is a purpose built electric powered model aircraft flying field which complies with national and international recommended safety standards.





**WILLIAM EWART HART**

# **A FORGOTTEN FIRST**

**AN UNFINISHED BIOGRAPHY OF  
AN AUSTRALIAN PIONEER AVIATOR**

**by Keith White**



W. E. HART.

Front Cover Photo:

Parramatta's Council Jubilee Book - Aviator W.E. Hart - December 1911

(This document is not for sale and will be given by the author with his thanks.)

Compiled and Edited by Gregory L. Edwards - June 2022.

(As Editor for this book I will give an update to any new findings at the time of writing – Ed)

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

I identify the contents of my manuscript as an unfinished biography of William Ewart Hart (1885 – 1943). This is because the present whereabouts of his business records and private papers are unknown – hence the subtitle, “PART 1: Work in progress”.

These documents may be in the hands of his son, William Ewart Hart Jr., who moved from Sydney to Melbourne with his mother in the early-to-mid 1950s.

We know his widow visited Sydney in June 1963, to attend the unveiling in Parramatta Park of a special memorial to her late husband commemorating his flight from Penrith to Parramatta on **3 November 1911**. Unfortunately, the narrative featured on the front of the memorial contains a number of errors of fact which have been drawn to the attention of the Parramatta Park Trust.



*Memorial dedicated to Aviator William Ewart Hart – Parramatta Park*



According to a paper dated "22 Jan 2002", prepared by "one of Hart's relatives" and held by the National Library of Australia, Canberra (NLA), we are told the son, William, used to visit his aunt, Mrs. Essie Mayo, the youngest of his parent's siblings, who died 1991, when he drove an interstate truck to Sydney ... "but all contact is now lost!" ... a quote from the same paper held by NLA.

To date, my attempts to contact William, Jnr, have been unsuccessful.

Of Hart's 58 years of life, his aviation career was restricted to a time frame of almost 12 months i.e., from 21 September 1911, when he took possession of his Bristol Boxkites at Penrith until 4 September 1912, when he was very seriously injured as a result of his aircraft crashing into the ground from a height of some 200 feet. He suffered many injuries which effectively ended his flying career.



## **PREFACE**

There is an old saying ... people only remember winners ... but William Ewart Hart seems to be one exception of a winner who has not been well-remembered.

Unfortunately, it seems he has not been remembered in a biographical sense which I believe his exceptional contribution to our national aviation story warrants.

He won recognition in 1911 as the first pilot to be qualified in Australia, and yet, after many adventures during 1911 and 1912, which included competing in our first international air race and attracting the attention of the Sydney public of the time, he is all but forgotten, except for a dedicated few ... William or Billy who???

Yet, to all those who knows of his achievements, he holds a special place in the history of those early days of aviation in Australia.

Some years ago, I began collecting material on the life of Billy Hart (as he was known) with the view that someday, I may try to write his biography. As time went by, I realised this was going to be a lengthy task of research as material was scarce and, at times, contradictory. What did surprise me was that no recognised author had written his biography, although Norman Ellison, author of "Flying Matilda", published in 1957, did write a short biographical article about him for inclusion in a book entitled "Wings over the North", published by The Newcastle 9New South Wales Aero Club in 1938 to celebrate its 10th anniversary.

More recently, I have been advised that the National Library Australia, Canberra, holds papers in the form a draft of an unfinished biography of Billy Hart, written by Norman Ellison.

I thought this lack of biography was unusual because his flying career was without equal during our early days of aviation and was well-worthy of being recorded for posterity. After all, as I have written above, he was the first person in Australia to obtain what we now know as a pilot's licence, and he excited the local population of Sydney, particularly whilst flying his Bristol Boxkite biplane and his associated adventures ... and misadventures ... in the Sydney region.

Other sources do provide what are perhaps short excerpts of a particular incident/s in his flying career, and newspapers / magazines have published short biographical style articles about him.

Wishing to research his business records and private papers, I have spoken to some members of his extended family only to learn that his widow and their son, William, had moved from their home in Cheltenham in Sydney to Melbourne in the early 1950's, and contact between them has been lost. I have not been able to make direct contact, but I am still trying.



Some libraries hold private documents of prominent people of national significance, which are available for research purposes, but when I enquired at the state Library of NSW, the only document they have is a copy of a six-page article written for "Life" magazine by G.C. Percival entitled "Our ablest Flying Man, the achievements of W.E. Hart." This was published on 1 September 1912, just 3 days before the serious accident which ended his flying career. I was advised most, if not all, libraries should have a copy of this document.

I have found two private publications, which have been very helpful. One is a paper prepared for the Nepean District Historical Society Inc., Penrith, and presented on 23 October 1969, by R.J. Gibson, Controller, Research and Information Bureau, Qantas Airways Limited, and a former President of the aviation Historical Society of Australia (NSW) Inc. It is entitled "The Penrith – Richmond Area – A Cradle of aviation." The other publication is "A Brief Biography of William Ewart 'Billy' Hart" compiled in 1988 by the Reverend Brian William Hart, a grand nephew of the late W.E. Hart. On 5 November 1986, the Reverend Hart was a guest speaker at the monthly meeting of the NSW Branch of the Aviation Historical society of Australia. He discussed his great uncle and chose to name his topic "The Adventurous Amateur in the Sky."

He spoke of his pioneering spirit of the Hart family which seemed to be personified in Bill and his adventurous, high profile approach to aviation. Bill's dental surgery at 243 Elizabeth Street, Sydney, seemed to be a mecca for aviators. Rev. Brian said there was always a room set aside for a card game, a statement with Bill's dental nurse strongly disagrees. As she said, it was a very busy practice.

I was told about a book, that was published in 1994, entitled "The Billy Hart Story", written by Phillip Hart-Johnson, another grandnephew of Billy. This book is fiction, but is "based on a true story", as quoted in the book. As I was buying a copy of the book, I was advised not to allow my "maiden aunt" to read it, but it does have some good photographs! (Keith is right here – some rough language thrown around which was completely out of character for Billy, as Billy was a dutiful Methodist. Phillip was hoping to have his adventurous book made into a Hollywood movie – Ed)

In November 2010, I was contacted by the Melbourne Branch of the Aviation Historical Society of Australia to write a short biography (5000 words) of "William Ewart Hart and his Bristol Boxkite" for publication in the Society's magazine, "Aviation Heritage". The article was to appear in its March 2011 issue, but was delayed until the September 2011, issue. Subsequently research has highlighted some additional information, as well as errors of fact in the article, which will be corrected in this biography.

All this means the main source of information about Billy Hart and his aviation adventures has come from newspaper and magazine articles, historical societies, copies of correspondence held by our National library in Canberra and the like.

Consequently, the story which follows is taken mainly from the public record of the life of William Ewart Hart, dentist and pioneer aviator, and as such, until his business records and private papers become available, must be considered as a “work-in-progress”.

When all is said and done, his flying career, about which the print media was primarily interested in reporting, allowed him “to show others the way in aviation”, and is the reason for writing this biography, as best I can.

Keith White,  
Sydney,  
April 2017.



**Editor's Update:** Unfortunately, William Jr., died before he could be reached. I understand that he was very private and would not have kept anything of value for historians. He lived in a small unit in Shepparton, Victoria, out of contact with family. Shepparton News and the funeral home has been forthcoming with information. He lived his later months of his life in a caring aged residence, mainly for the homeless, in Melbourne. William lived longer than the 58 years that his father attained and died at age 84. It was believed that William had two sons, Ken and William. Here we go, another William to find. The Solicitor / Executor was co-operative; however he did not have the addresses of the brothers, so their whereabouts are still a mystery.

**HART, William Ewart.**  
07.07.1936 ~ 21.06.2021.  
Passed away peacefully  
in Melbourne after illness.  
Will be fondly  
remembered by the staff  
and residents of  
Wintringham Housing.  
  
*Rest In Peace Bill*  
  
Privately Cremated.  
  
**CLIVE COVENTRY**  
**SHEPPARTON (03) 5831 3922**  
[www.clivecoventry.com.au](http://www.clivecoventry.com.au)

*Shepparton News 23 July 2021.*



The veteran birdman congratulates the fledgling. Mr. W. H. Hart, of Sydney, who gained Australia's No. 1 flying licence, thanks airline Captain John McLaughlin—who was one year old when Hart first flew—after Hart arrived in Melbourne by mail plane from Sydney.

*Hart & Hart Jr with Captain John McLaughlin arrived by mail plane from Sydney.*

*Photo: -The SUN - 30 Jan 1940*

In this photo of William Jr., he would have been aged 4 years. Hart Snr died 3 years later. Therefore, Hart Jr, was fatherless at the age of 7 years.

The only new information I could find is that William Ewart Hart Jr married in Victoria in 1959 to Pamela Frances Major. The 1963 Census shows that WEH Jr was living with his mother in Prahran, Victoria.



## INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw aviation “enthusiasts” worldwide actively pursuing and developing their knowledge and theories concerning the science of powered flight.

In 1903, powered flight by man became fact. Whether the New Zealander, Richard Pearse, was the first person to have powered flight in an aircraft in March 1903 at Waitohi in the South Island of New Zealand, or whether it was the American Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, USA, in December 1903, does not matter here. A new dimension had arrived for one and all to develop.

Flying in aircraft in those days was a hazardous “sport”, and very much in its infancy. Pilots, and their passengers, were basically “learning on the job” from their own mistakes, if they survived them, and the mistakes of others.

In Australia, and certainly in the Sydney area, it was soon realised a controlling aviation body similar to those being established overseas was a necessary requirement to introduce some form of control over local flying activities. Countries such as England – The Royal Aero Club of Great Britain since 1901 – and France – Aero Club de France – had such established active organizations.

In time, this led to an inaugural meeting held in Sydney by interested people on 28 April 1909 to consider the formation of a proposed Aerial League of Australia. The meeting was chaired by Lawrence Hargrave. A provisional committee meeting was held on 19 May 1909 and those included **Lawrence Hargrave, George A. Taylor and Major Charles Rosenthal**.

The minutes of that meeting record that “The rules of the Aeronautical Society of Great Britain as well as the regulations thereof were carefully discussed and amended to suit local conditions”. The chairman of the meeting moved that “the rules as altered be adopted. The motion was seconded and passed”.

The Aerial League of Australia became an instrument of influence and control as aviation developed here.

At this time, the aeroplane was seen very much as an instrument of defence, and the Aerial League lobbied the Federal Government to offer a cash prize of £5000, subject to certain conditions, for the first Australian to build a “flying machine” to be used for military purposes here. One report suggested “world-wide interest was aroused”. The prize was never paid because “... none of the entrants had submitted his invention to the Department’s practical tests.”, but the interest in aviation here grew as a result. Two years later, even Billy Hart spoke of the use of the aeroplane for defence purposes – but more of that later.



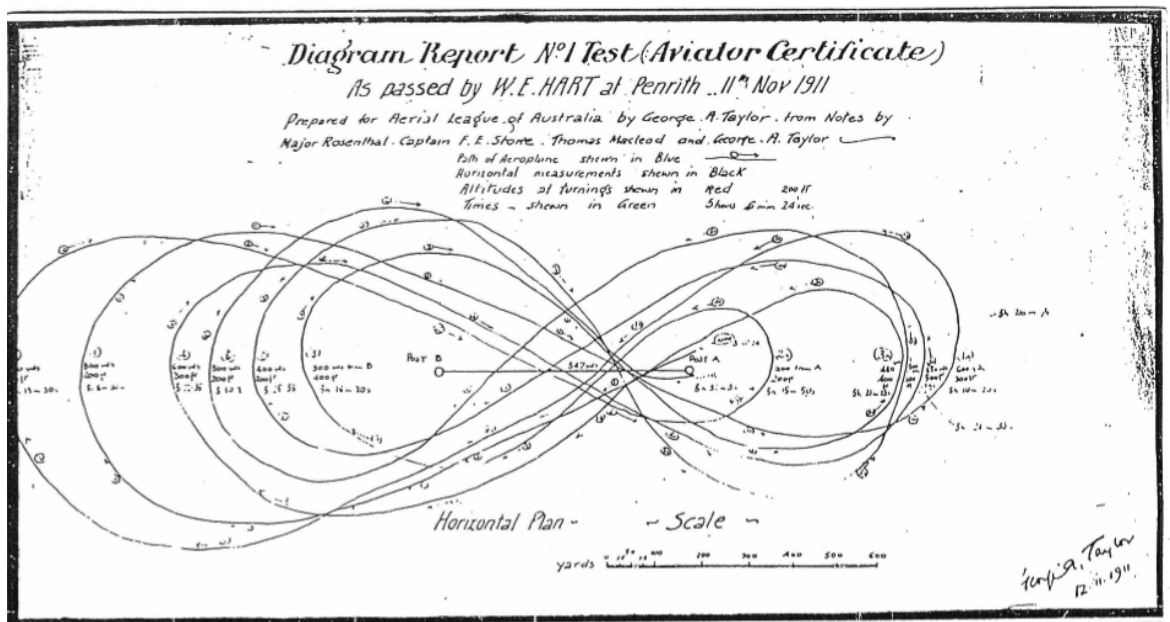
In September 1910, the aerial League selected an area of land near Penrith railway station for an airfield to be used by its members. The area never lost its appeal for speed, becoming Penrith Speedway from early 1924.

But, from our point of view, perhaps the League's most interesting activity came in November 1911, when it supervised the flying tests by W.E. 'Billy' Hart for his pilot's licence, or "Aviator's Certificate" as it was then known.

When accepting his "Aviator's Certificate" in December 1911, Billy Hart said he began to "study the art seriously some two years ago" (his words), but when you consider that this would have been less than six years since the Wright Brothers made their powered flights, what technical information would have been available to him?

Broadly, there would be the knowledge that powered flight had been with us for thousands

(even millions) of years in the form of animal flight (e.g., birds) which had been developed through evolution, whereas human flight (e.g., gliding) is of much more recent technology resulting from man's desire to emulate nature and fly – remember our Greek mythology and the legend of Daedalus and Icarus dating from the 8<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Technology from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century would have greatly helped Billy.



William Ewart Hart was the first person in Australia to qualify for an "aviator's certificate", now known as a pilot's licence, and he was the only person to do so with the Aerial League of Australia.

On 9, 11 and 16 November 1911, at Belmore Park, Penrith, N.S.W., he passed a series of flying tests, set by the Royal Aero Club of the United Kingdom, and supervised by officers of the aerial League of Australia. In December 1911, he received aviator's

**Certificate No. 1** from the Aerial League, and, in March 1912, **Certificate No. 199** from the U.K. body.

Three other Australians, H.R. Busteed, Oswald Watt and Eric Harrison, certificate numbers 94,112 and 131 respectively, had qualified before him with the Royal Aero Club of the United Kingdom for the “aviator’s certificate”, but they had achieved this distinction in the United Kingdom.

For the next ten months, until his serious accident on 4 September 1912, the publicity created from Billy’s flying experiences via the print media and the picture industry of the time helped to popularise this new concept of powered flight in the minds of many people, particularly in the Sydney area.

Even today, powered flight by humans has its limitations when compared, for example, to the freedom of birds, but it has been progressed by the purposes for which. Humans wish to use it, e.g., transport, communications and travel, and there is always future development of its applications to anticipate.



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## CHAPTER 1

### HIS EARLY YEARS: 1885 – 1901

William Ewart Hart was born in Parramatta on 20 April 1885 Birth Registration No. 180160. Unfortunately, when referring to the year of his birth, some authoritative organisations such as the Federation Aeronautique Internationale and the Royal Aero Club of the United Kingdom have incorrectly stated the year of his birth as 1886.

He was the third child and second son of his parents, William Henry (1855-1937) and Maria Alice, nee Gazzard (1862-1935), both of whom were born in Parramatta. He had seven sisters and four brothers, of whom one sister and one brother died in infancy.

William Henry Hart was well regarded in the community and very generous to charitable causes and to his family. According to his daughter, Essie, he built a house for each of his daughters when they married, except Essie who was given money. He had an inexhaustible fund of humorous anecdotes and a gift of swift repartee.



*PHOTO: Courtesy Greg L. Edwards*

#### HART FAMILY – CHRISTMAS 1913

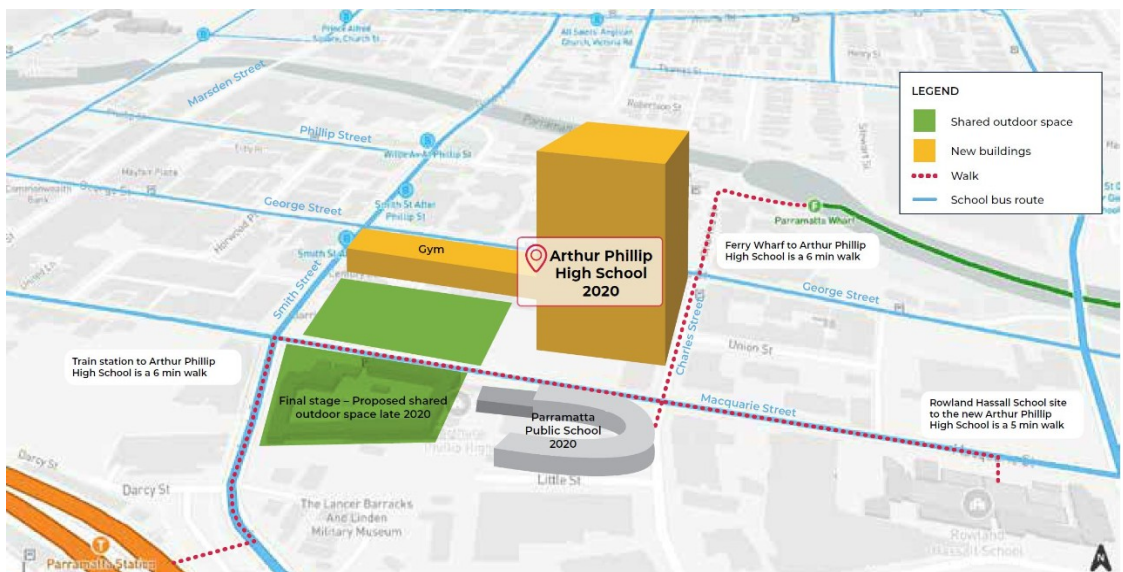
Back	L-R	Flo	Billy	Cassie	George	Dot	Jack
Front	L-R	Winnie	Bert	Mother Maria	Father William Snr.	Essie	Boey

His father was a successful timber merchant for many years, operating a large business in Darcy Street, Parramatta known as “Hart and Sons Cumberland Steam Saw and Joinery Works”, as well as the Rose Hill Wharf on the Parramatta River. In 1893, the firm took in a partner and became known as Hart, Hitchcock and Co. The timber yard included land on which the old Darcy Street Parramatta Library is located, and the business was one of the original 12 subscribers connected to the Parramatta Telephone Exchange, which opened on 20 November 1893. By 1911, the business employed 103 people.

William Ewart Hart, or “Billy Hart” as he became known, was born into and raised in comfortable circumstances. His youngest sister, Essie (1901-1991), told the Reverend Brian Hart that Billy’s early education commenced at a “cottage” or “dame” school in Parramatta conducted by two ladies, who also taught Essie. He continued his studies through the public education system. By contrast, Billy’s elder brother, George, and Albert, one of his two younger brothers by 14 years, received private school education.

The cottage school is now a small museum in the grounds of what was then the Parramatta Superior Public School and, in 1958, became the Arthur Phillip High School, Smith Street, Parramatta. At the time of researching his early years, I found the honour roll at the high school listed his name among those former students of the school who volunteered for military service during the Great war 1914-19 – now known as World War 1 or just WWI.

(Editor’s Note – Arthur Phillip High School has now been rebuilt and it is the first public high-rise high school in New South Wales. I believe the cottage school will be retained.)





He next attended a technical institute, still in Parramatta, to study dentistry. In 1938, the journalist / author, Norman Ellison, wrote an article about William Hart's career for the Newcastle Aero Club's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary publication, "Wings over the North". The following is an extract from that article about a young Billy Hart, who "... showed unusual mechanical aptitude. As a schoolboy, he built and sold bicycles, and a holiday trip demonstrated rare commercial instinct. He and a pal collected all the old umbrellas within pocket-range, bought some electric bells, some tins of toothpaste, and half a sack of moth balls. They set out to hawk their way to Newcastle. They mended umbrellas, installed some electric bells – 'they worked, too,' declares Hart – and sold their wares. Each of the 14-year-olds had £3 when he arrived in Newcastle ..."

Billy Hart attended St. Mary's Anglican Church at Toongabbie, N.S.W., built in 1883 by Hart / Lavors Builders, where his name, "W.E. Hart Aviator", appears on the wall plaque commemorating the names of parishioners who served in "The Great War 1914 – 1919".



*St. Mary's Anglican Church at Toongabbie, N.S.W. - Honour Roll*





## CHAPTER 2

### HIS FIRST APPRENTICESHIP: DENTISTRY, 1901-1904

In 1901, at sixteen years of age, young Billy was indentured to A.B. Maxwell, a dentist in Parramatta, to serve a three years' apprenticeship to "... learn his art and business as dentist and everything relating thereto ...".

**V**ACANCY for a DENTAL PUPIL. Pre-  
mium. **A. B. MAXWELL,**  
Dental Surgeon, Parramatta.

These days, when referring to the profession of dentistry, apprenticeship may seem an unusual word to use, but, until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the only means of acquiring full dental training in New south Wales was by serving an apprenticeship practitioner.

But, at the same time, each and every dentist was a law unto himself. There were no official rules, regulations or codes of practice. In fact, anyone could practise as a dentist, with or without approved training in an apprentice scheme.

**NOTICE OF REMOVAL.**

**MR. A. B. MAXWELL,**  
— **Surgeon Dentist,**  
Begs to announce that he may be consulted at his new DENTAL STUDIOS,  
Corner of—  
**Church & Phillip Streets,**  
**PARRAMATTA.**

**MR. MAXWELL** takes this opportunity of thanking his numerous patrons for their past support and trusts for a continuance of their confidence.

Painless Extractions. Artificial Teeth Elegantly Fitted.

MODERATE FEES. Telephone No. 159 P.



*The Cumberland Argus and Fruit growers Advocate -p7- 9 Feb 1901*

(This late Victorian building in Parramatta was erected in 1889. That was only 4 years after Billy Hart was born. Parramatta was an up-and-coming township. The architect was Mr. Walter Hillary Monckton, and the contractor was A.M. Allan. -Ed)

In 1885, a course of mechanical dentistry was established at Sydney Technical College, and in 1887, there was “a class of mechanical dentistry attended by twelve students”. More change came in 1900, when the first Dental Act was ratified by the N.S.W. government, effective 1 January 1901.

On 1 March 1901, the University Dental School came into existence, using a curriculum which covered a three years' course leading to a Licence in dental Surgery (LDS).

For young Billy, the provisions of the new Dental Act required him to have the secondary school matriculation standard of education as a necessary qualification for his apprenticeship, because he was not apprenticed for twelve months prior to 1901.

To complete the dental practise course as we know it today, dental apprenticeships ceased with the dental Act of 1934, when Batchelor of Dental surgery (BDS) through university education, became the only approved source of dental training.



## CHAPTER 3

### WEST WYALONG: 1904 – 1909

In 1904, at the age of 19, Bill Hart opened a dental practise in West Wyalong, NSW. This town is some 520kms from Sydney. As he could not practice under his own name until he was 21, the brass plate at his surgery bore the inscription:

**A.B. MAXWELL, DENTIST  
(PARRAMATTA) REPRESENTED  
BY W.E. HART.**

He became a registered dentist on 25 June 1906, and, in the same year, took over Mr. Maxwell's dental business.



*West Wyalong, NSW- Globe Hotel & Wyalong – c.1896 (West Wyalong Museum)*

In the five years Hart lived in West Wyalong, he became recognised as one of the town's most active and colourful citizens. Some of his interests included having a two-story building – Hart's Building – constructed by his father in the town's main street and occupying the upper floor for his dental surgery, purchasing three farming properties in the district totalling 3380 acres (1367ha), and having the first motorcycle and driving the first motor car, a two cylinder De Dion, to enter West Wyalong. He gave hair-raising exhibitions of speed riding his motorcycle on the training track at the Recreation Ground. In time, his interest in motorcycles and motor cars led him to obtain the southern agency for Ford motor vehicles from the makers New South Wales distributor.

Billy Hart had a well-developed enthusiasm for his profession as the following Hart story told by an old-time resident of the area illustrates. The editor of a local newspaper (name not known) published a letter from a Barmen reader which states in part "... Even in those days he was a remarkable man. He rode a motor bike. He had a cane chair bike seat fitted to the front of it to carry a passenger. If he got a call from a lady for dental treatment, he rode his motor bike to pick up the patient. I recall a patient from Marsden, but I forget whether Hart went to Marsden or the patient journeyed to West Wyalong. However, the patient ... a pregnant lady near her time ... had several badly aching teeth. Hart extracted them and the elderly women of the town were shocked. They said the baby would be born with a misshaped (sic)/ mouth. The old ladies had some funny ideas in those days ..."

Also, the report of his death in the West Wyalong advocate dated 2 August 1943 included a paragraph which reads: "Old residents will remember Mr. Hart's advertisements on the local paper – depicting a grinning boy with 2 or 3 teeth missing in front and the caption 'It never hurt a bit.'."



In time, his dental practice extended to such communities as Lake Cargelligo, Condobolin, Temora, Cootamundra and Wagga Wagga, and probably other places in between.

On 6 June 1908, the Bland District Historical Society reported: "W. Brindley L.D.S. to commence dental practice with W.E. Hart." The society also reported that Hart went to Newcastle on 24 November 1908 (reason unknown), returning to West Wyalong on 2 March 1909 and that, 5 May 1909, "he was charged by the Bland shire Council with erecting a balcony without permission ... case dismissed."

On 11 August 1909 he sold his dental practice to Bernard H. Kenny and returned to Sydney. He was 24 years of age. By 1914, he had sold most of his interests in the district.

"West of the Bland" is a book published in 1968 by the Bland District Historical Society and contains the following two quotes concerning Hart: "Among the many colourful

personalities who have lived in West Wyalong was one of those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines, the late W.E. 'Billy' Hart ... "and "His adventures and achievements form an important part of Australian history and he is numbered among those who have brought fame to West Wyalong."

In 1914, he returned to West Wyalong for a visit which was acknowledge by The West Wyalong Advocate, on Saturday, 19 September 1914, with the following article:

"Mr. W.E. Hart, the pioneer Australian aviator and well-known dentist, is on a visit to West Wyalong, accompanied by his father, having travelled from Parramatta (where Mr. Hart is practicing) per motor car. Mr. Hart will be remembered as having practised his profession in West Wyalong for some years. Whilst here he became largely interested in farming properties. He now reports having disposed of most of his interests in this district. His "Tallandoon" property of 1741 acres on the Willandry Road has been purchased by Mr. J. W. Robinson of Victoria and "Fisher's Farm" of 1114 acres adjoining has been purchased by Mr. G. P. Aughey of South Australia. Another adjoining Mr. G.P. Evans' farm has been purchased by Mr. Frank Hoare at a satisfactory figure to the vendor."

The article continued: "Hart's Building in Main Street have (sic) been sold to Mrs Quail. Mr. Hart has now a very large practice in Parramatta and says that he is "too busy for flying now." Mr. Hart Snr. Visited this town just on eight years ago and was greatly surprised at its growth and the progress of the district since he was here last. Mr. Hart has been approached by the local Committee in regard to giving an aviation exhibition here on Eight-hours Day for the patriotic movement and says that owing to being too busy in his profession he has not a machine of his own ready but there was every probability he can secure the use of a new Bleriot monoplane belonging to a friend of his in Sydney (and which is fitted with his old trusty and reliable 50 h.p. Gnome engine) on which he has flown 7000 miles".

Almost 60 years later to the day, "The Sun" newspaper, dated 18 September 1974, published an article covering Billy Hart's flying career in which it is reported: "The pilot chalked up 7000 hours (sic) in his Bristol before it went beyond flying capability. That is the equivalent of 19 flying hours in each 24 hours for a calendar year. The article should have reported "7000 miles".

Perhaps this "Sun" writer could be excused for this error because a measure of a pilot's flying experience has long been expressed in 'hours of flying', and not miles/kilometres travelled whilst flying. In fact, Allan Stephens, in his book, "Going Solo", a history of the Royal Australian Airforce – 1946 -1971 – page 78 – writes "Under a distinctive Air Force accounting procedure, flying hours were also used as a means of controlling the activities of subordinate units. Flying hours can be used as the unit of measurement through which an air force manages its entire range of activities; they are, in sense, a unique form of money."



## CHAPTER 4

### BACK TO SYDNEY: 1909 – 1911

The two-year period between August 1909, and September 1911, seems to have been one of re-adjustment in lifestyle and occupation for Billy Hart.

He was an experienced dentist who had just sold his practice. He had a growing new car business, which was profitable, but his “mechanical aptitude” was drawing another part of him towards the new marvel in society, man achieving powered flight, or, as we now know it today, aviation, and **time would prove him to be the right man in the right place at the right time.**

As time passed, names such as Hargrave, Taylor, Defries, Houdini and Duigan and their aerial deeds in the new field of powered flight would have come to his attention from newspaper reports, etc., and would have continued to increase his growing interest in this new development.

Taking a line through the southern agency for Ford motor cars he held whilst living in West Wyalong, and remember, he left there when he was 24, he continued that association when he moved back to Sydney by obtaining a new Ford agency, which he established at 65 Market Street, Sydney, in the late 1909 or early 1910.

**You will NOT have to**

**PAY FOR YOUR EXPERIENCE**

**IF YOU CONSULT HART on YOUR NEXT PURCHASE.**

**TYRES, OILS, GREASES, and all General MOTOR ACCESSORIES.**  
**MOTOR BOATS.**  
**HART'S MOTOR OILS.**  
**HART'S SPECIAL MOTOR OIL for FORD CARS.**  
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**100 New Cars supplied last 12 months.**

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Can advise you upon, and Purchase any Car, on Better Terms than by Dealing Direct.



*West Wyalong Advocate - 22 July 1911*



Busy as he would have been establishing a new car agency in the city at that time, I have been able to find only one statement by him about his interest in aviation up to that time and that was in a newspaper article dated 6 December 1911, reporting on the function held the previous night by the Aerial League of Australia to commemorate Hart's success in qualifying for his "aviator's certificate."

The article stated: "Mr. Hart ... said he had started to study the art seriously two years previously." This means that the concept of powered flight had only been achieved by the Wright Brothers in December 1903 less than six years before Bill Hart "started to study the art seriously". As I reported earlier, where did he obtain the technical material he required to do so? Was he communicating with other pioneers of the day?

Where/who were they? In Australia and/or overseas? Perhaps from our very own Lawrence Hargrave as Hargrave was a member of the Aerial League, too. (It has been mooted that letters had been exchanged between the Wright Brothers and Hargraves before their famous flight. – Ed)

Without access to his personal papers, if still available, we will probably never know the answers to these and other questions concerning his early introduction to the technicalities of aviation.

However, one thing is certain, there was not the public reaction to the Wright Brothers' achievement of powered flight as there would be expected from today's society in similar circumstances. Quoting from Alfred Gollin's book, "No Longer an Island", published 1984, "No government paid more attention to the early activities of Wilbur and Orville Wright than did the British Government ... Britain's negotiations with the Wrights present a record of lost opportunities and missed chances ... The American Government made similar or even worse mistakes, particularly between 1905 and 1907."

So, what would he have had available to study when he was thousands of miles from Europe and the United States of America? The two years from 1909 until when Hammond arrived in Sydney in April 1911, saw an increase in aviation activity, particularly from England and France, which may have encouraged this enthusiastic student of the new development to search for more technical data.

But why did he leave his profession of dentistry and take up the car business? Samuel Brogden writes in his book, "The History of Australian Aviation", published 1960, that Hart "... practised in Sydney and West Wyalong but seemed to have made more money out of buying and selling cars."

Initially putting all his energy into his car business, Hart still would have been interested to learn of the arrival in Melbourne, Victoria, on 5 September, 1910 of Gaston Cugnet (Aero Club of France Licence No.140), who had been sent there by the Bleriot Company of France.

Greg Copley, in his book, "Australians in the Air", published in 1976, writes that Cugnet's assignment was "... to tempt the defence Department, but ... Pilot Gaston

Cugnet failed to make a good first impression.” However, Neville Parnell and Trevor Boughton, in their book, “Flypast”, published in 1988, write that he was to assess “... the possibility of establishing an aviation business in Australia ...”

Whatever the reason he was sent from France, the result of his mission was the same ... unsuccessful.

At the same time as Cugnet was establishing himself in Melbourne, the Melbourne Bicycle Club (MBC) was endeavouring to restore the glamour of its annual event, the Austral Wheel Races, with additional attractions. For the 1910 event, as described by Keith Dunstan in his book, “The Paddock That Grew”, published 1988, the MBC decided to stage an aeroplane flight right out to the Melbourne Cricket Ground, and chose the Bleriot monoplane, piloted by Cugnet, as a featured event.

Continuing Keith Dunstan story, on the day of his flight, no date given, Cugnet “... refused to take off until the weather conditions were just right. When the weather conditions were just right, the cycling was long over and it was almost 7.00 p.m., so late that most of the Austral crowd had gone home.” Eventually, the Bleriot rose into the air, ducked, tried to sidestep the scoreboard, then dived into the tennis court. Mr. Cugnet was unhurt, but his Bleriot was hideously wrecked ...”

Copley’s article reported that Cugnet “... attempted a flight despite windy conditions ... in front of a big crowd at Melbourne Cricket Ground on 5 December 1910 and crashed. The crowd unfortunately contained a number of Government officials.”

“Flypast” simply reported “...3 (not 5 as stated by Copley in the previous paragraph) December 1910 ... Cugnet attempted a flight ... despite windy conditions but collided with an obstruction at the western boundary and crashed into adjoining tennis courts.”

The wrecked Bleriot was eventually shipped to Brisbane in March 1911 and placed on display for several weeks. It was last known to be in the possession of R. Bowen, a member of the Queensland aero Club. Cugnet made no further flights in Australia.

## **THE BRITISH AND COLONIAL AEROPLANE COMPANY**

Billy Hart’s attention would next be drawn to the arrival in Fremantle, Western Australia on 13 December 1910, of a British sales mission from the British and Colonial Aeroplane Company. Its aim was to interest our Federal Government in purchasing its aeroplane for defence purposes. With the mission were two pilots, J.J. Hammond and L. MacDonald, as well as a full-time mechanic named Frank Coles, and two created Bristol Boxkite biplanes, production numbers 10 and 11, and two 50 h.p. Gnome rotary engines.

Hammond (1886 - 1918) was born in New Zealand and was the chief pilot of the sales mission. MacDonald (1890 - 1913) was born in Bristol, England and was also an engineer. They had been issued with RAC Licence No. 32 dated 22 November 1910 and

No. 28, dated 15 November 1910, respectively, having qualified some time before those dates.

A total of 69 accident-free demonstration flights were made displaying the various features of their aircraft, particularly to the military authorities. Of these, 7 were over Perth and 31 over Melbourne and Sydney using Boxkite No.10 between January and May 1911.

In February 1911 the Australian Minister for Defence, Senator G.F. Pearce, was impressed by Hammond's flights in Victoria, as were other defence personnel, but the sales mission's approaches to the Defence Department brought no action from the Australian Government, which simply was not interested in buying aircraft for defence purposes at the time. However, favourable public reaction, including from the Aerial League of Australia, to the flying activities of the British team was of concern to the Government, which cabled the Australian High Commissioner in London, "Newspapers here agitating for formation of Aviation Corps. Can War Office give advice?"

At the time, the British War office itself had not made a decision on selection of aircraft, and it was not until 11 June 1912, that a communication was received by Pearce from British War office advising the types of aircraft it had chosen for military purposes.

Even in those days, there were apparently leaks from office as the Australian Government had prior notice of the British selections as it had placed orders overseas on June 1912 to buy aircraft for a military wing ... but not Boxkites!

The decision by the Australian Government seems inconsistent when considered alongside the approval by Senator Pearce for a competition closing 31 March 1910 (extended to 39 June 1910) and offering a prize of £5000 for the best and most suitable aeroplane for military purposes, subject to particular conditions, a competition which lapsed due to no entrants being received. Subsequently, it seems the Federal Government was really waiting to be advised what the British Government planned to do with aircraft for defence purposes.

In fact, it was not until early 1914 that the newly appointed Australian Aviation Instructional staff began the task of establishing the Central Flying school (C.F.S.) at Point Cook (originally spelt "Cooke"). On 1 March 1914, the first military flight in Australia was made in a Bristol Boxkite, registered as CFS 3.

With the failure of the Bristol sales mission, the last demonstration flight over Sydney was made at Ascot Racecourse on 9 May 1911, by which time Hammond had left the Bristol Sales Mission. One report published in "Aircraft", dated 1 March 1930, states, "It is interesting to record that the pilot, Hammond, directly against the orders of his company, flew over Sydney. For this he was dismissed."

No further explanation is given. However, the Royal New Zealand Air force (RNZAF) Museum Booklet, published in 1987, reported that "... the pilot, Mr. Joe Hammond, was

dismissed for carrying an unauthorised passenger ...” in the RNZAF’s tandem seated Bleriot, New Zealand’s first military aircraft!



*J.J. Hammond at controls - (FLIGHT Magazine)*

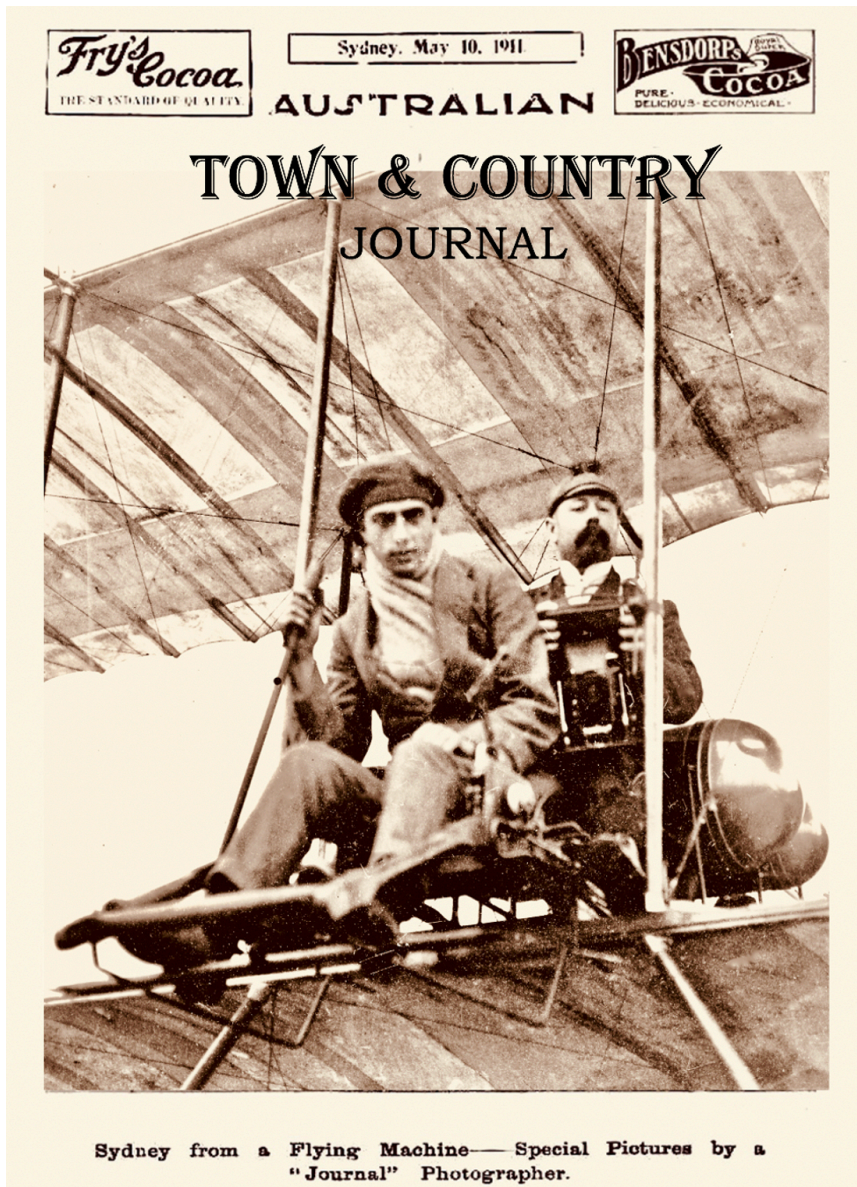
With Hammond’s departure, the other pilot of the Bristol sales team, MacDonald. Was left in charge of the two aircraft and ancillary equipment. One report suggested Boxkite No.10, the aircraft and ancillary equipment. One report suggested Boxkite N0.10, the aircraft used during the demonstrations, went back to England along with Hammond, but another suggests that Hammond went to New Zealand, not England. According to another report, one engine went to India, and Boxkite No.10 stayed here!

What we do know is that in December 1911 after Billy Hart qualified for his “Aviator’s Certificate”, he offered the Government two Boxkites, one without engine, for £1300. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume his purchase from the Bristol Company through MacDonald included the two Boxkites (Nos. 10 and 11) and the engine in number 10 aircraft, but I am getting ahead of myself ... more later!

The Federal Government may not have been interested at the time in buying aircraft, but Billy Hart was interested in buying Boxkite (No. 10) which he had seen “... on the outskirts of Parramatta.” Number 11, which was still crated, was stored at Rosehill Racecourse.

In those days, aviation facilities were virtually non-existent in the Sydney area, although, in September 1910 the Aerial League of Australia had leased an area of land to the north of Penrith railway station, 54km west of Sydney, as an airfield for use by its

members. For what little flying activity took place at that time, it seems horse racecourses such as Ascot, Rose Hill and Victoria park were preferably used for aircraft movements. To complete a quote mentioned above from Samuel Brogden's book: "So much did he make that he was looking around for a safe investment when Hammond arrived.", although, to my mind, how buying an aircraft in 1911 could be considered a safe investment is very questionable! Billy Hart, however, must have been beside himself seeing the biplane flying over Sydney including all the newspaper reports with photos. He may have seen it as another business opportunity, but it could be a case of just another collection of big boy toys. He had a speed boat, motor cars and motorcycles so why not add a flying machine to his repertoire.



**Aviator L.F. MacDonald and Mr. G.A. Hills Photographer in Bristol Boxkite Biplane**  
*Front cover reproduction - Australian Town and Country Journal - 10 May 1911*

In researching the aviation segment of Billy's career, I found on a number of occasions conflicting statements between what was said by him and/or reported by the media at the time of any particular event during the 1911-1912 period and what Billy recalled in statements he made years later as reported by the media.

An example of this is the forced landing he made when returning to Penrith from Parramatta on 3 November 1911. The media report dated 4 November 1911, quotes that he "... pulled up in splendid order in Mr. George Best's paddock."

This particular incident is remembered by him for landing in the Chinese Market Garden!!

I have endeavoured to present both versions of other conflicting statements as they arise through this biography.



*Billy Hart signing postcards c. 1912 - (Parramatta Heritage Centre)*





## CHAPTER 5

### HIS SECOND "APPRENTICESHIP" – AEROPLANING: 1911

*Aeroplaning is just motoring that has thrown off its last lingering shreds of the prosaic in motion.*

G.C. Percival – 1 September 1912

#### BILLY BUYS HIS BRISTOL BOXKITE

Like many hundreds and, no doubt, thousands of people living in Sydney at the time, Billy Hart would have been aware of e.g., the Harry Houdini flights from Rosehill Racecourse during April 1910, and he would have seen the Bristol Boxkite flying overhead on some of its 31 demonstrations flights over Sydney during April and May 1911. These activities would have further interested this adventurous, capable young man.

As Samuel Brogden wrote, Hart was looking for a safe investment, and, in Billy's mind, he found it.

Since 9 May 1911, when the Boxkite was last flown, it seems newspapers reported nothing about the Boxkite. It is not known how Billy Hart came to know the Boxkite was for sale. Perhaps MacDonald advertised it was for sale. Be that as it may, Hart learnt of its availability and negotiated with MacDonald to buy the aeroplane. He did not negotiate with Hammond, as some reports incorrectly indicate, as the latter had already left Australia. Hart agreed to buy the aeroplane for £1300 including 30% customs duty, which was later refunded to him. The figures for the sale price and the rate customs duty vary between others, but the nett amount he paid was £1000.

Two stories explaining how the refund of duty was obtained are on the public record and follow. The first is a quote from an unidentified newspaper report, headed "W.E. Hart in a Reminiscent Mood", of an interview Hart gave in 'Cumberland Argus' 30 December 1927. He said: "At the time, there was a duty of 33 1/3% on aircraft, after several visits to Melbourne to interview the Minister for Customs, I was instrumental in having the duty removed, and obtaining what is known as a drawback of the £330 duty, which had been put on the machine. To secure this, I had, as a matter of form, to box my machine and send it by cargo vessel beyond the three-mile limit. This vessel went to New Zealand and back, but the machine was not moved until it was returned to Sydney. The freight only cost about £30, so I was some £300 to the good."

The second story about the customs duty incident involves the National Library of Australia, Canberra, which holds an undated and unfinished draft of a Hart biography written by Norman Ellison, from which the following extract is taken: "But Bill did tell me this: 'the Bristol's man had explained that the Customs dues were very high.' and I said, 'Well why the hell are they so high? And why should I get sluggish for buying the first aeroplane in Australia? Get stuck into that.'" That summarises what Bill told me, a

long time ago. I can't remember the ensuring details. But I think the Box kite (sic) which had been shipped to New Zealand and had stayed there for a certain period was shipped back to Sydney. This travel somehow took a lot of steam from the Customs heat which had seared the sensitive hide of Mr. H (sic). Whatever the financial facts, he was certainly a very proud man when at Penrith he became master of all he aeronautically surveyed.”.

Incidentally, in December 1911, Customs duty rules were changed to allow British aircraft to enter Australia duty free.

## **BRISTOL BOXKITE 1910**

Some comments and details of the aircraft would be appropriate at this point.

Oliver Tapper describes the “Bristol Boxkite” in the book, “Roots in the Sky”, as follows:

“Unofficially, called the Boxkite, this was the first successful aeroplane built by the British and Colonial Aeroplane Company (now Bristol Aeroplane Company). It was a copy of the French Farman biplane and was powered by a 50 h.p. Gnome engine. The Boxkite remained in production until 1914, 76 produced, more than 20 were sold overseas. It had a wingspan of 34ft. 6 in., and its maximum weight was 1050lbs.”.

A revised edition of “In the Cockpit”, published in 1991, features an article by Mike Serram, which is headed by the following: “On first acquaintance one is reluctant to believe that the contraption can actually fly.”.

Some other comments are:

- The pilot's position ... was atop the lower wing leading edge, surrounded by bracing wires but otherwise open to the elements.
- The control system ... is simplicity itself. It can be mastered in a few minutes and it requires so little physical effort that a child can manoeuvre one of these machines in flight.
- It was a pirated but improved copy of the biplanes developed by Henri Farman from early Voisin designs.
- First commercially – produced British aeroplane, selling in 1910 for about £1100, of which 76 were made – more than 20 were sold overseas, including 8 to Russia.
- Pilot and passenger sat on the centre-section of the lower wing ahead of the 50 h.p. Gnome rotary engine installed in pusher configuration aft of the wing.
- The passenger/ observer sat close behind, and somewhat higher than the pilot, with his legs around the pilot's body.
- The Shuttleworth (England) Trust's Boxkite replica, built for the movie, “Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines”, is reported as “The thing is a devil to fly.” Level flight could only be maintained at a speed of precisely 50 km/h.

- As a result of the gyroscopic action of the heavy, spinning rotary engine, it was all but impossible to persuade a Boxkite to make a left turn at all; there was simply was not enough aileron power to counteract the aeroplane's right -turning tendency.
- The late Neil Williams, who flew the Shuttleworth's replica, commented thus, and I repeat from above: "on first acquaintance one is reluctant to believe the contraption can actually fly."

According to C.H. Barnes' book, "The History of Bristol Aircraft since 1910", there were three models of the Boxkite manufactured in England: civilian, military and competition (2 variants for racing). The two wings of the military model were extended to 46ft 6 in or 47 ft 8in. No detail was given for its lower wing.

In Australia today, there is one complete replica Boxkite in the Oakey Flypast Museum in Queensland, and there is a military version (registered VH-XKT), which is now on display at the RAAF museum, Point Cook, Victoria. It had its successful test flight on Wednesday 11 September 2013. With Air Vice-Marshal (ret'd.) Mark Skidmore at the controls, the Boxkite, the aircraft flew about 1000 metres and reached a speed of 42 mph. AVM Skidmore, a former F-111 and ARDU test pilot.



## CHAPTER 6

### HART'S FILM CAREER

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw the first major steps being taken by two new industries in particular which have had a tremendous influence in changing our society, certainly in the western world. They were 'moving pictures' and 'powered flight'. Very early, these two influences recognised the benefit each could be to the other by combining the skills of their respective disciplines in a presentation on moving film to the public of aviation events as seen through the lens of a camera.

Up to this time, there had always been the print media, which was ever ready to publicise aviation events and stories, write its reports in complete detail, and publish still photos, when available. On this subject, I spoke to Tom Ballentyne, aviation correspondent with the paper, 'The Sydney Morning Herald', about the lengthy newspaper reporting by a word picture of particular events in aviation in its early days. He replied that today such freedom to write was now usually restricted to a certain number of words per article.

Moving pictures (film recordings) were made as early as 1896.

Australia's first continuous narrative or feature film of any substantial length was 'The story of the Kelly Gang', which was screened in 1906.

From that time, narrative or feature films, in aviation, no pun intended, took off.

In Sydney, where the new interest in aviation was growing, Bill Hart and his Bristol Boxkite aeroplane became an interesting attraction to moving film producers, particularly when he began to be examined for his 'Aviator's Certificate' by the aerial League of Australia during November 1911.

But first, there are two classic photos taken by Mr. J.L. Turner, the photographer for 'The Sun' newspaper, on 12 November 1911.

The caption for one of these photos is headed: "A REMARKABLE SNAPSHOT OF MR.W.E. HART'S FLIGHT AT PENRITH YESTERDAY MORNING." And describes the photo as "... undoubtedly the most striking aviation picture ever taken in Australia." and continues: "It was before 5 o'clock (a.m.) when the train came along, and Mr. Turner availed himself of a unique opportunity to secure a picture of quite prophetic import – showing how people travel now, and how they are certain to travel in the future."

The newspaper emphasised that the photo "... is printed as taken, not being 'faked' in any way.". The other photo was "ANOTHER MAGNIFICENT PHOTOGRAPH OF MR. HART'S FLIGHT AT PENRITH," ... and had been "enlarged without 'faking'."



*Bennington's Pictures – The Parramatta Flying Man (W.E.H. Scrapbook)*

At the same time Turner was taking his photos, it would seem that a local film producer, Mr. T.J. West, was filming what he described as Hart's "... sensational aeroplane flight over Penrith". West was one of three prominent film producers in Sydney. In 1911, he had introduced the concept of showing the newsreel style of film and had made it a regular feature of his theatre programs. On one occasion, West's moving film newsreel featuring Hart's flight over Penrith was shown. There may have been other occasions.

In subsequent weeks, Bill Hart and his Bristol Boxkite continued to attract publicity, particularly because his aircraft was the only one based and flying in Sydney, until early 1912 when an American pilot named A.B. 'Wizard' Stone arrived with his Metz-Bleriot monoplane, and a 'Globe of Death' act on a motorcycle for performances at agricultural shows and the like throughout NSW and Queensland – he also went to New Zealand.

I do not know whether Stone knew Hart before arriving here, but he soon became aware of him, and, on 14 April 1912, challenged him to three air races. On 22 April, Hart accepted the challenge.

C.C. Spencer, another prominent film producer in Sydney, became aware of the proposed "International Air Race" between Hart and Stone, and judged there would be considerable public interest in a feature film involving at least one of the contestants. Spencer arranged for his cinematographer, Ernest Higgins, one of the three then highly qualified Higgins brothers, to fly with Bill Hart, during which Higgins filmed a full-length feature film which Spencer named "**The Camera in the Clouds**" and released it at his Lyceum Theatre on 15 June 1912, the day the air race was scheduled to be held, but the race did not start due to inclement weather. This film according to 'The Sun' - p8- 16 June 1912, "Several months ago Spencer's, despite previous failures – and they were legion – determined to show on their screen how the world below looked from an aeroplane and arranged a contract with Mr. Hart's company for a number of flights. The

work of taking the film covered over a month, during which period the camera went aloft six times."

Higgins flew a total of 18 times with Bill Hart while filming what Spencer advertised in 'The Sydney Morning Herald' - p2 - on Friday 14 June as "How it feels to Fly" and "Through the air with William E. Hart (Australia's pioneer aviator)" and Mr. Ernest Higgins, Spencer's chief cinematographer, has secured the first successful series of moving pictures ever taken from an aeroplane."



Spencer's 'Camera in the Clouds' - (W.E.H. Scrapbook)

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**THE LYCEUM.**

Direction ..... C. SPENCER

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**TO-MORROW'S BIG NOVELTY.**

Commencing at the Matinee,

TO-MORROW, TO-MORROW, TO-MORROW, TO-MORROW,

**HOW IT FEELS TO FLY.**

'THE CAMERA IN THE CLOUDS.'  
'THE CAMERA IN THE CLOUDS.'  
'THE CAMERA IN THE CLOUDS.'  
'THE CAMERA IN THE CLOUDS.'  
'THE CAMERA IN THE CLOUDS.'  
'THE CAMERA IN THE CLOUDS.'

Through the Air  
with

**WILLIAM E. HART**

(Australia's Pioneer Aviator).

Mr. Ernest Higgins, Spencer's Chief Cinematographer, has secured the first successful series of moving pictures ever taken from an aeroplane.

**FULL ORCHESTRA AND EFFECTS.**

ADMISSION: 1/6, 1/, 6d. Plan at Paling's (2/6).  
Day Sale White Rose. Doors 7, Overture 8.

**WE CHANGE MONDAY AND THURSDAY.**

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Spencer had timed the release of his film to coincide with the print media advertising headlines such as: The Sensation of the Century. - Australia's First Aerial Race commencing from Ascot Racecourse. - First International aviation Contes. - W.E. Hart (Australia) v 'Wizard' Stone (America'.

On 14 September 1912, Spencer's second film involving Bill Hart was shown at the Olympia Theatre. This was another "scenic" film named '**Among the Clouds with a Camera**'. Spencer claimed there was not a "dull foot of film" in the whole feature. The timing of its release was unfortunate, as, ten days before, on 4 September 1912, Bill Hart had returned to his base at Ham Common (now part of RAAF Base, Richmond) after flying his new monoplane and crashed unexpectedly onto his airfield from a height of some 200 feet. He was very seriously injured and spent some two months recovering in Windsor Hospital. He never flew any great distance again. The accident also ended his film career. In fact, at the time of the first screening of the film, he had just come out of a coma for the first time since his crash. Spencer's third film in which Bill Hart appeared was named '**Australia Calls**'. This particular film was number 93 in a catalogue entitled 'Australian Films 1900 - 1977' compiled by Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper and published in 1980 by Oxford University Press. The story for the film was written by two regular contributors to the magazine, 'The Bulletin' and vigorously expressed the magazine's xenophobia. Its theme was "What would Australia do if a yellow horde suddenly descended on the continent?" The film was a complex production, shot on and off over a year, and involving contributions from each of the previously mentioned three Higgins brothers. It opened at Spencer's Lyceum Theatre, Sydney, on 19 July 1913, for a month-long season. 'Australia Calls' covered the country towns of NSW as well as in capital cities around Australia. Read below a review from Hobart - 1914 Feb 26 - The Mercury, Hobart - Australia Calls at His Majesty's.

**HIS MAJESTY'S.**

"Australia Calls" is the title of a striking film which heads the new programme of Spencer's pictures, shown last night at His Majesty's Theatre. It is based on the defence position of the Commonwealth, and advocates a true patriotic spirit in order that the sons of Australia might be ready to answer any call received to defend their country. The picture opens with a prologue, "The Warning," showing a Sydney race-course and race, then a football match witnessed by thousands of spectators. During this time the Asiatics land 20,000 troops on the New South Wales coast. A proclamation is issued to the Australians, and is readily responded to. The operations of the enemy and the mobilisation of the Commonwealth troops are strikingly featured, while the burning of Sydney by night and all the horrors attending the destruction of this fine city cannot fail to emphasise the well-known scout motto, "Be prepared." A love story runs through the picture. Australia's aviator, Wm. E. Hart, is introduced with his aeroplane to effect the rescue of a lady. The story goes on, and the Australians, after many daring deeds, win outright. The picture conveys its lesson in a forceful manner. The star film, which is 5,000ft. in length, is strongly supported. As usual, the gazettes are full of interest. In the London budget the most striking features are Leicester Show, Paris fashions, the King's prize cattle, and a pageant of living pictures at the Albert-hall, London. "The Lindisfarne Regatta" at Hobart is one of the main attractions of Pathe's Australian Gazette.

Over 4000 feet in length, it shows an invasion by an Asian force of some 20,000 which included an air armada and a naval fleet, whilst the citizens of Sydney enjoyed their horse racing, football and the surf. "A love story is introduced in which aviator Hart rescues the heroine in his aeroplane from the enemy. The story continues, and eventually the Australians, though everything is against them, win out."

**THE POPULAR VERDICT !!**

**The Royal Pictures**

**STAND ALONE !**

**Some Coming Attractions**

**To-morrow (Saturday) Evening :**

"WAMBA, A CHILD OF THE JUNGLE" absolutely the greatest animal picture ever produced.

**SPECIAL NOTE—TUESDAY NEXT—" AUSTRALIA CALLS "**

Australia's great Military Production showing Australia in time of war and featuring Mr W. E. Hart, the aviator. Special choruses by School Children. For "Australia Calls," only, the prices will be 1/6, 1/-, 6d, and seats may be reserved at Proctors 6d extra.

*Royal Pictures Advertisement (The Grenfell Record - p2 - 14 Nov 1913)*



*WAMBA, A CHILD of the JUNGLE -1913 Silent Picture - USA*

As there was only one aeroplane in Sydney at the time, a lot of the director's ingenuity was required to create the image of an attacking air armada.

The National Film Archive has advised me no copies of the above three films are in its files. If any copies exist, they are in private hands.



*Photo: Keith White*

Here is a better view of the 50 Gnome rotary engine on the No.10 Boxkite. The crankshaft of a rotary engine stays stationary; however, the entire cylinder block and propeller revolve around it which produces high gyroscopic forces.

There are two tanks. The rearmost tank contains castor oil to keep the engine well oiled. Bill Hart would oft give a laugh as his assistants on the ground who would get a spray of oil on take-off. The front tank contained fuel. The passenger / cameraman and the pilot are sitting right on top of these tanks. Hey, who needs seat belts when you're having fun!



## CHAPTER 7

### BILLY HART'S FLYING CAREER

*The engine is the heart of an aeroplane, but the pilot is its soul.* Sir Walter Raleigh (1861 – 1922)

The period from September 1911 to September 1912 is the extent of Billy Hart's flying career. However, in this short period of time, it has been recognised that this was the true beginning of Australian aviation. Billy found a suitable landing field, had a workshop canvas hangar, began an aviation school and did exhibition flights. Hart was at the forefront in promoting Australian aviation in the delivery of mail and for defence purposes. If for nothing else, he inspired countless others to take to the skies.

In writing this biography, I have separated his story into monthly articles commencing from September 1911 and continuing through to September 1912.

#### SEPTEMBER 1911

##### LEARNING TO FLY

At 26 years of age, Billy Hart's second "apprenticeship" – training to be a pilot – was about to take-off!

His future was beginning to come together, and, to him, it must have looked exciting as he launched himself into his new career, which I consider started on 21 September 1911, when his crated Bristol Boxkite arrived at Penrith by rail, although at least one other report states: "... by road."

Billy Hart may have had his aeroplane, but he did not have an airfield from which to fly it, and, as well, he had no workshop facility in which it could be maintained or repaired. With the knowledge that the Aerial League of Australia had selected its airfield in the Penrith area, and no doubt, **guided by MacDonald's experience**, he leased from the owner, **Mr. Sydney Smith**, at no cost an area of land known as Belmore Park on the northern side of Penrith Railway Station. He considered it to be "... the best natural aerodrome within a reasonable distance of Sydney ..." The entrance to this land was opposite the railway station.

Billy's new landing field was ideally flat and void of trees, as it was on flood lands near the Nepean River. This airfield was at the base of a hill. On the hill was the farmhouse, Thornton Hall.





*THORNTON HALL (Laura Player Collection)*

Thornton Hall is located North Penrith, NSW. The house was built in 1882 for Thomas Smith, a prominent local resident and was voted an Alderman of the first Penrith Council. His son Thomas Richard Smith was a local parliamentary representative being Member for Nepean in the Legislative Assembly from 1877-87, 1895-98, and 1901-1904 and elected Mayor of Penrith in 1889. The land on which Thornton Hall stood was originally 320 acres. Thomas Smith was a wealthy landowner who owned large sections of High Street. He also built and owned the Red Cow Inn. Thornton Hall was Thomas Smith's family home, and, on his death, **he left the property to his son, Sydney Smith.** Sydney Smith also became a local parliamentary representative and served in Parkes' last ministry as Secretary for Mines (1889-1891) and was also First Secretary for Agriculture from 1890.

The lease for the land was signed on 23 September 1911.

Wonderful things do happen. Often a lot of letter writing, inhabiting libraries, attending aviation groups and searching the Internet gets the information that you seek but it is very time consuming and yet only delivers more brick walls. Sometimes you get lucky. Information on your research topic can arrive unexpectedly by mail. An undated copy of "William Hart's Signed Diary Notes", arrived in a large envelope. So, it does pay to let everyone you meet know what you have are currently researching. These diary notes covered two matters. The first deals with Billy's selection in 1911 of Belmore Park for his aviation activities – that story follows the conclusion of this paragraph – and the second deals with him meeting Bert Hinkler after the latter's flight from London to Sydney in February 1928 – that story will be told later in this bio. The original of this page carried his normal signature: "W.E. Hart".

Quoting from his diary notes as follows:

- A. "Now came the matter of finding a suitable location for my flying experiments. After travelling many hundreds of miles inspecting various "grounds" within fifty miles of Sydney I was fortunate enough to discover an ideal spot situated right at Penrith Railway Station where the Penrith Speedway is located. I chose this spot for various reasons. It was right at the Railway Station and handy to Sydney, it was a very large area of nice level ground, almost entirely surrounded by "emergency" landing grounds, and with but very few trees and other obstructions. Principally, one could nearly always depend upon calm mornings and evenings. I still consider this one of the finest sites for an aerodrome that I have ever inspected in the vicinity of Sydney. I approached the owner, the Hon. Sydney Smith, and not only did he offer me every assistance, but he gave me the use of the ground for as long as I wished to use it for my aerial experiments, without any charge whatever. So, my machine, tent and general 'impedimenta' were duly transported to Penrith."
- B. Needless to say, it was a source of great pleasure to me to have the opportunity of meeting and congratulating my old friend, Bert Hinkler, on the success of his wonderful flight from London to Sydney. I have known Bert since he was quite a lad and **I met last week on the very spot in Parramatta Park, where I landed about 18 years ago.** I still do quite a lot of flying, although I sold my private "bus" some time back. This "bus" was originally Bert Hinkler's Baby Avro, the machine in which he put up his wonderful flight from Sydney to Bundaberg, non-stop, some years back. Captain Percival, of Richmond (I gave him his initial flying lessons some 15 years ago) has an "Avro Avian" similar to Bert Hinkler's and I had the pleasure of flying with him to Parramatta Park on the occasion of Parramatta's welcome to the renowned aviator, and we did a few "stunts" over the gathering by way of a personal welcome to Mr. Hinkler to the old Historic Town. Captain Percival and I hope to fly to Penrith on Easter Saturday next, during the next meeting at the "Speedway" and do a few "stunts" over the site of my earliest experiments. To me, this will awake many old and pleasant recollections.

These diary notes must have been written in 1928 and that is when the Penrith speedway was operating. These were typed up notes. They were used, perhaps, for a speech. Maybe these were the notes Billy used when he met Bert at Parramatta Park.





*Aviator Bert Hinkler and Pioneer Aviator William Hart at Parramatta Park*

*(The Sun - 13 March 1928)*

The diary notes continued ... “on the same day that the lease was signed, the aircraft was taken and placed in a large tent erected for the purpose.”.

On the following day, the biplane was quickly assembled by Hart, MacDonald “... and a number of assistants,” watched by a large crowd, “.... Naturally curious to know what was going on.”

But what were the people of Penrith thinking when they heard of the arrival of the aircraft? Many, if not most of them, would have no idea of what an aeroplane looked like! ... like a bird? How big will it be? How noisy? ... and so, the questions would have been asked between people. Even today, many of us may have no idea of the answers and questions being asked back then. I guess Billy Hart would have been hard pressed to answer some of them himself! And what was the reaction of the people living in those outlying areas, almost certainly hearing and seeing an aeroplane in flight for the first time?

On 23 October 1969, R.J. Gibson, a former President of the Aviation Historical Society of Australia (NSW) Inc. gave a talk to the Nepean District Historical Society Inc. His subject was “The Penrith – Richmond Area – a Cradle of Aviation”, from which the

following quote is taken: "I wonder if we can now imagine the surprise and excitement of people in these outer areas in 1911. Perhaps that one flight to them was like man's first step on the moon recently was to us. Here was history in the making."

I believe the first indication of what lay ahead for the township of Penrith and its residents on the one hand and Billy Hart and his aviation activities on the other was a report in the local paper, "The Nepean Times", Saturday 23 September 1911, which reads:



... and so "a cradle of aviation" was about to be created.

During the morning of 25 September 1911, came the moment about which "The Nepean Times" had written the following. MacDonald test flew the newly assembled Boxkite. In the afternoon, he took a no doubt very excited Billy for his flying lesson over Castlereagh, then onto Edenglassie and Glenleigh and back to Belmore Park.

The take-off procedure for the Boxkite was very different to that of today. Quoting Norman Ellison from the draft (held by the NLA) of his unpublished Hart biography Hart biography: "From a primitive seat above and directly behind the pilot's head, the pupil-passenger could see the one mechanical control – the ignition switch. He was taught how the pilot knew his altitude by the use of an aneroid barometer worn strung around his neck. The engine testing was another operation new to the pupil, but he, being mechanically minded and highly adaptable, immediately understood its operation. Additional equipment included a spring balance, like a butcher's steelyard, fastened between two lengths of rope. One rope's end was tied to the tail of the aircraft, and the other end, to a strongly set post. After the mechanic twirling the propeller into life, he then went rearwards to watch the pull-weight registered. When the pull (in lbs) was sufficiently high, the mechanic waved the OK to the pilot, when the signal was

acknowledged, the mechanic would cut or unhitch the rope near the tail, and the aircraft would trundle away, ready for take-off.

“As an instructor, MacDonald was very thorough, very decent, Hart declared ‘but,’ he added, ‘he just wouldn’t teach me what I most wanted to learn – to fly’.”.

Those who knew Hart well knew he was a very shrewd salesman of great tenacity. So, although his statements on the point reported the Bristol man as being adamant, those intimates of Hart’s were convinced that, the instructional limitations notwithstanding, Bill got his money’s worth in this part of the deal.”

At this point, due to the lack of information and dates, it is necessary to imagine what happened over these few days involving the Bristol Company, MacDonald and Billy Hart.

Between 25 September and 29 September 1911, I believe MacDonald would have allowed his pupil to practice taking off, controlling the aircraft in flight and landing until the latter could perform these actions without MacDonald’s hands being involved. When the decision from the Bristol Company was received not to allow MacDonald to teach Hart what he needed to know about flying the Boxkite, Billy Hart could have had a serious problem, but it seems common sense prevailed, and the two men continued to work together.

On 1 December 1929, the aviation magazine, “Flying”, published an article entitled “My First Flight”, by W.E. Hart, Australia’s No.1 Pilot.

The article’s introductory paragraph, probably written by the magazine editor, follows:

“Proud Possessor of No.1 Australian Flying Licence, Mr. William Hart is probably the only self-taught pilot in Australia. His story of his first flights, untaught and in an untried machine, send a thrill of admiration through all who recognise the pluck and enterprise that was necessary to perform these feats.”

Bearing in mind that this article was published 18 years after the event, and this appears to be the first time he had published such an article, unfortunately, his memory is in error, as shown in the following quotes:

“After some negotiations I purchased the machine ... with ... a guarantee that (MacDonald) would teach me to fly, but before this became possible, the makers repudiated the guarantee unless I gave an undertaking not to build aeroplanes in Australia. I naturally refused to do this and was left to my own devices as to how best to take to the air. (MacDonald) gave ... me a thorough course of ground instruction. He drilled me in everything short of taking off and actually flying.”.

Hart later wrote in the same article: "We were fated never to fly that machine, however, for a few days after its arrival a strong wind bowled it over and over like a piece of paper, and it finished up a tangled and twisted wreck, across a fence."

Research through the print media shows Billy received ground and flying tuition from MacDonald before the windstorm wrecked the Boxkite, as shown in the following summary:

**Saturday, 23 September 1911:** Crated Boxkite arrived at Belmore Park.

**Sunday, 24 September 1911:** Aircraft uncrated and assembled.

**Monday, 25 September 1911:** Bristolian MacDonald took Parramattan Billy Hart up for instruction as a passenger.

**Tuesday, 26 September 1911:** More dual instruction – series of flights, one of 27 miles – in total, over 100 miles flown, climbing above 3000 feet in height. At the time, the flight of 27 miles claimed to be the longest in Australia.

**Friday, 29 September 1911:** More flying, including "alone" flight – after landing, aircraft hit a tree stump and was slightly damaged – repaired (on 7 October 1911, 'The Nepean Times' reported Mr. Hart as saying he had landed safely, and the machine had almost come to a standstill, when a wheel found a small stump, and swerved the machine very slightly against a tree. The damage was slight, but, unfortunately, necessitated dismantling the machine.)

**Saturday, 30 September 1911:** 'The Nepean Times' reported: "The Machine That Flies" and "MANY SUCCESSFUL FLIGHTS". "Monday morning at 10.30, a short trial flight was given the machine by Mr. MacDonald ... and in the afternoon the aviators took the machine for a lengthier trip ...".

**Monday, 2 October 1911:** Boxkite wrecked in windstorm -rebuilt during the month of October 1911.

**Thursday, 2 November 1911:** Hart again flew "alone" – I believe this flight has been considered incorrectly as his first solo flight.

The word used today to indicate a pilot is unaccompanied when he is "solo", but, back in the days when Billy was learning to fly, the word "solo" only described a performance by one person on stage. In the vernacular of the day, Billy Hart would have been flying "alone" on 29 September 1911, as reported in 'The Nepean Times' dated 7 October 1911, and he was flying alone when they "fated" to fly it before the aircraft was destroyed during a severe windstorm on 2 October 1911.

A colleague has suggested to me that maybe the "alone" flight/s by Hart during the last week of September 1911, were not "alone", but were actually made with MacDonald

and reported as “alone” flights to protect the latter from any reports getting back to the English manufacturer, which had forbidden him to give flying instructions to Billy.

However, it is my belief that Billy Hart was flying “alone”, as in “solo.”

In 2014, I wrote to Oxford University Press seeking information concerning the word “solo”. In its reply dated 29 January 2013, I was informed as follows:

“The first citation of the word ‘solo’ in the sense of ‘solo flying’, in the Oxford English Dictionary is from September 1911, only a month before the article you cite from The Nepean Times.”.

With that explanation, it would seem the word “solo” had been accepted into the English language and was in use in the United Kingdom, well before it was adopted here, and certainly after Billy commenced his pilot training.

Incidentally, there was another language difference in use then. In Hart’s day, flying experience was measured by miles travelled ... not flying hours ... see above entry for September 1911. The principle of using miles travelled as a measure of experience apparently still applied when Bill Hart wrote to the prime Minister on 30 June 1913, in which he stated that he ... had flown ... 5000 miles, in 1000 flights ...”. When the first flying training course commenced at Point Cook, Victoria, from 17 August 1914, flying time was recorded in minutes and hours, not the number of miles travelled.

Below is the important article about the destruction of Billy’s biplane in full. Newspapers try to report the facts, but they can do only so much.

The Nepean Times – Penrith – Saturday, 7 October 1911.

## **The Flying Machine**

### **DAMAGED BY WINDSTORM.**

Mr. W. E. Hart's biplane, which last week made numerous flights over the town and district, was very considerably damaged on Tuesday last (3 October 1911 - Ed) (However further into the interview Billy says his plane was ready for a Monday afternoon flight but the wind broke the ropes and his machine was tossed upside down – so this mishap happened on **Monday 2 October 1911** – Ed) by a strong gusty wind, which had met with a slight mishap a day or two previously through striking a stump, had been again, repaired and given a fly, and was left near the tent on Belmore Park, where the trouble occurred. A rather strong wind got up, and one or two extra sharp gusts carried the machine some twenty or thirty yards from where it had been left, turning it completely over. The result was disastrous, the woodwork was broken and splintered, the plane ripped, and the splendid machine which the residents were wont to see soaring at a dizzy altitude above the town now presented almost the appearance of a

total wreck. Fortunately, the engine, propeller, etc... were uninjured. Mr. Hart, we feel sure, has the sympathy of everyone in what can only be put down to sheer bad luck.

Speaking to a press representative, Mr. Hart said: - " In the trial flights my machine behaved beautifully, and one day we flew 100 miles. Our first mishap occurred after landing at the end of a flight, alone. I had landed safely, and the machine had almost come to a standstill, when a wheel fouled a small stump, and swerved the machine very lightly against a tree. The damages were slight, but unfortunately necessitated the entire dismantling of the machine. This mishap occurred on Friday afternoon last (29 September – Ed). On Monday my own machine was again ready, and after a very satisfactory flight we thoroughly overhauled the engine preparatory to our projected long flight on Monday afternoon. Everything was in thorough order, and the machine was ready in our tent when we left for lunch. A slight breeze had sprung up, and we took the precaution to rope the machine firmly to the ground. On returning, however, we found the wind had considerably increased, and while we were approaching the machine an extra powerful gust broke the ropes, lifted the machine and tent up, and the whole thing, turned completely over, reducing the framework to splinters. Fortunately, the engine and propeller were uninjured. It is most unfortunate that, after the machine behaving so splendidly, these accidents should happen. We are not disheartened, though, and have already commenced renovating the biplane. Fortunately, we have some spare material, and feel confident that we shall have the machine ready within a fortnight. We can assure the public that they will then have the opportunity of seeing some splendid flights around the city."

**Mr. Hart wishes to impress the public with the fact: that his machine is as safe as could be, and that he has never yet had an accident while actually in the air. In several recent flights he has carried a passenger.**

On 26 October 1938, the local Parramatta newspaper, "The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers' Advocate". Published the same article, as mentioned earlier, on 1 December 1929, in its Sesquicentenary issue under the following headings:

## **PARRAMATTA'S PIONEER AIRMAN**

### **W.E. HART'S MEMORABLE FIRST FLIGHT**

#### **HOW HE LANDED ON SYDNEY SHOWGROUND**

Mr. William E. Hart, holder of No. 1 Australian flying licence, and probably the only self-taught pilot in the Commonwealth, is a native of Parramatta. His first flight, from Penrith to Parramatta in 1911, was an epic – one worthy to be ranked with any that have since earned our admiration. Indeed, his enterprise and courage have won for him an honored (sic) place among the heroes of the air".

The above article, published in "Flying" magazine, dated 1 December 1929, was repeated in "Flying" magazine, dated December 1954, i.e., 25 years, and with the same

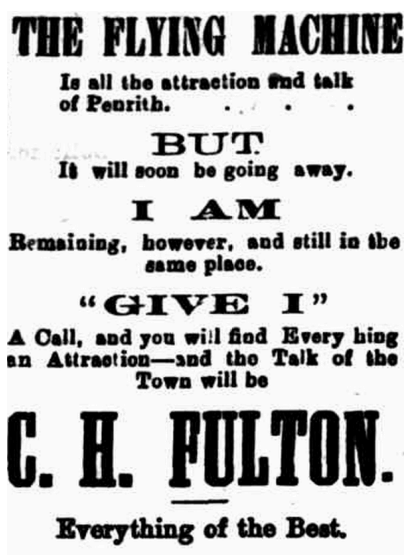


mistakes, so the errors in the original articles unfortunately continue to appear in the later article.

Whilst the general consensus of opinion of the population of Penrith and its surrounding districts was favourable to the presence of Billy Hart, his Boxkite and his aviation operation at Belmore Park, at least one local businessman thought he had a more interesting offer to make to the public and advertised accordingly.

So, it was on the 8 April 1911, an advertisement appeared in "The Nepean Times" and it continued for several months.

Perhaps this was the first ad in the Commonwealth incorporating flying.



I do not know whether C.H. Fulton's money was well spent on that advertisement, ... but I believe his business continued for many more years. What Fulton and others of that time didn't realise, is that they thought that these "flying machines" were just an "attraction". They didn't comprehend that the world had just changed. Aviation had just been launched into a brave new world.

To finish this story of Billy's September 1911 activities, 'The Nepean Times' dated 30 September, reported, reported "On Saturday, it is said, Mr. Hart will fly his machine from Penrith to the Sydney Showground, where a motor show is being held.". But which Saturday? The Nepean Times was a weekly newspaper so the report would have been written before the tree stump incident and must have been referring to the same Saturday as the publication day. Eventually, that flight to the Sydney Showground did take place on Saturday, 18 November, but more of that when writing about Billy's activities during November 1911.



## CHAPTER 8

### OCTOBER 1911

#### DISASTER

In the previous chapter I had the article from The Nepean Times – Penrith – dated Saturday, 7 October 1911 it came under the banner of - **The Flying Machine.** DAMAGED BY WINDSTORM. It stated that the damaging wind blew on Monday, the day before, i.e., 2 October ... and the Bureau of Meteorology has no official record of the time to confirm the correct day!

A colleague has given me photocopies of three documents which he obtained from the National Library of Australia (NLA), Canberra, recording individual experiences of three individuals who worked with or knew Hart. One document is dated 22 Jan 2002 and written by one of Hart's relatives, a second is undated but believed by NLA to have been written by Norman Ellison, author of 'Flying Matilda' (1957).

Incidentally, all three documents refer to him as "Bill", and even though Air Marshal Sir Richard Williams, former chief of the Royal Australian Air Force, in his book. 'These are Facts', (page 41) refers to him as "Billy", I am more comfortable referring to him as "Bill", which is what I will now use.

Returning to the story of his smashed Boxkite, it was taken to his father's joinery workshop at Parramatta where Hart, assist by MacDonald, Coles and others, all with minimal, if any, experience in building an aeroplane but having a positive approach to a project with, no doubt, a relatively high degree of difficulty, constructed what amounted to a new aircraft.

Physically, the Boxkite was a large aircraft, particularly for its time. It had a twin wingspan of 34 feet 6 inches, weighed some 1050 lbs ("Roots in the Sky" by Oliver Tapper), and was almost 12 feet in height. By comparison, Bill was 5 feet 4 ¼ inches in height (Australian Imperial Force Medical Report).

The question which comes to mind is why would he have not used his second Boxkite, (No.11) presumably still in its crate and fitted the repaired engine from the smashed aircraft into it? The smashed machine could then have been rebuilt as time permitted!

Quoting from one of the photocopies, "The Bristol Company had two machines and two Gnome engines out here, when Bill Hart bought a machine, he received one machine and one engine. The other machine was given to him as spare parts, and the second engine was sent over to India to the upcoming Durbar being held there. The two Bristol mechanics (MacDonald and Coles) were staying at the Great Southern Hotel in George Street, Sydney, waiting to go to the Durbar. I would go in and have a yarn with these two gentlemen, and when Hart had a smash with his machine, Leslie MacDonald said

we cannot sit here doing nothing, we are going to help him rebuild his machine and they did, they got little thanks for this. They apparently got into serious trouble with the Company and were sent back to England. Hart had his rebuilt machine and a yank (sic) (colloquial term for Americans) who had attached himself (to the group) was lolling about against the wing with his elbow on a rib. The rib broke, a new rib was made, allegedly out of Maryborough Pine. After that it was claimed the machine had been rebuilt entirely of Australian timber.”.

I was aware of a claim that Bill Hart had fashioned all the wooden components of the rebuilt aircraft himself, using Australian timbers, and, if that was so, I had thought he could have renamed his aircraft: the “Hart Boxkite”?! I can now understand why the Bristol name was not changed.

When the rebuilding of the Boxkite was complete, it was returned to his base at Penrith, and flying training recommenced.



## CHAPTER 9

NOVEMBER 1911

### SUCCESS

**“... as they flew into the unknown”.**

At the beginning of October, Bill Hart's expectation of having his smashed Boxkite ready to fly “in a fortnight” was most optimistic, but it was ready by the end of October. Together, MacDonald and he tested the rebuilt aircraft and found it satisfactory. Hart continued to practice what MacDonald had taught him, and, in his own words, “became expert at using the controls on the ground.”

Unfortunately for Hart, at this time, MacDonald was recalled to England, probably as a result of the latter assisting Hart in the aircraft rebuild and supervising his flying training, although he did not leave Sydney immediately, and actually visited the Penrith base on 11 November. Of course, MacDonald's departure left his well-drilled student pilot, Bill, to continue his own training to achieve what he (Bill) later described as his “mastery of the air.”

Naturally, the crowds, which had probably almost disappeared from the flying field at Belmore Park, Penrith, during the previous month when Hart transferred his activities to his father's works at Parramatta. Came back when Bill resumed flying training at Penrith.

Bill takes up the story (quoted from “The Cumberland Argus”, 26 October 1938): “One day a local resident asked when I was going to take it up, and more in a jocular spirit than anything else, I answered, ‘Tomorrow morning’. News travels fast in a country town, but I did not anticipate the crowd of 500 or 600 who turned up to see me take off. However, having burnt my boats, it was a case of now or never, and I told the mechanic to let go if I waved my hand. The engine worked well. I gave the signal. The machine started off, gathering speed as it made for the end of the paddock. The supreme moment arrived. Pulling the controls, I found myself 30 feet up in the air almost before I realised it. She appeared to be going nicely, so I tried the lateral controls, and the machine answered quite well. ‘This is easy,’ I thought, but at that moment the question of how to get down before the clumps of big trees were reached became pressing, I pushed the ‘stick’ forward, and somehow fluked quite a good landing, after having achieved, mostly by good luck, my first flight.”.

From that day on, Bill's activities were reported in detail and at length in the Sydney and Penrith print media, which was ready to publicise aviation events and stories. Some years ago, when talking to Tom Ballantyne, aviation correspondent with “The Sydney Morning Herald”, I spoke of the lengthy newspaper reporting of aviation in its early days, to which he replied reporting was now restricted to a certain numbers of words per article.

Returning to Bill's story:

"This performance was repeated many times that day, and I once flew over the town. By evening, I considered I was becoming an adept at the new art. The next morning, Friday, 3 November 1911, with my brother as a passenger, I flew to Parramatta, attaining an altitude of 3000 feet on the way." His "... flight over the town" was captured on another phenomenon of the time ... the moving film, which described the flight in a newsreel as "... sensational aeroplane flight over Penrith."

At this point, I believe it is desirable that I introduce the report of this particular adventure by Bill as it was published by "The Cumberland Argus Fruitgrowers Advocate" on 4 November 1911, i.e., **the day after** Bill's flight from Penrith to Parramatta. (There are differences between the story reported in the newspaper back in 1911 compared with Bill's story as reported in 1938.)

Saturday, 4 November 1911 – The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate

### **The Fly Mr Hart Aeroplanes to Parramatta And Away**

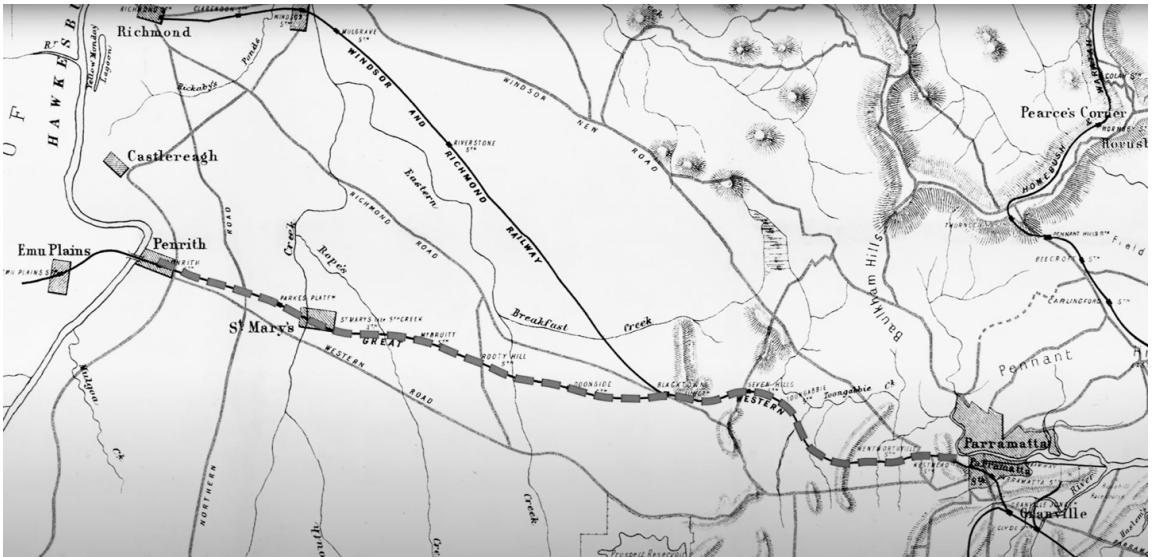
On Friday morning, before some of our residents were out and about, Mr. W. Hart, jnr., who has been planning for flight for weeks before, flew from Penrith to Parramatta.

Mr. Hart is the son of Mr. W. Hart (of Hart, Hitchcock and Co.), and learned the profession of a dentist. Then he took to learning the intricacies of a motor machinist's work, and that fired him with the possibilities of an exploration.

He learnt the business of aviation from Mr. MacDonald, from whom he bought the machine in which that gentleman carried Captain Niesigh from Sydney to Liverpool on the memorable occasion on which aeroplanes were first used in Australia for military purposes."

The newspaper article continues: **AN INTERVIEW**

"We picked up Mr. Hart on our aeroplane at Seven Hills. The plucky Parramattan said he had had a pretty good fly. "This morning," he said, "I went up for my second fly all alone. Mr. MacDonald, my instructor, has been called away to England, and I was left to my own resources. Yesterday I had some little journeys about Penrith, and shortly after about 15 miles each. Then I thought I would go down and have breakfast with my father at Parramatta. We made a good ascent, about a quarter to seven, and I was in Parramatta within 20 minutes. I was flying around 60 miles an hour, and I was up 3000 feet at one time. My brother Jack (who is 16 years of age) accompanied me. At North Rocks we met a nasty wind, which handled the machine like a cork in a gale. She rocked and ducked very much. At times she would stand up on her tail. Then she would swoop down like a tumbling pigeon and drop twenty yards without any warning at all."



***Penrith to Parramatta for breakfast - 3 Nov 1911***

The Cumberland Argus continues ...

“We made a beautiful landing in Parramatta Park, and after breakfast I thought I would do a circle or two of my native town with the machine. She flew like a bird at the start, shooting along for about 200 yards a few feet above the ground. Then I let her ascend, to avoid the treetops at Westmead, and she soared away to a thousand feet in no time. When I got over the trees, I found the wind very choppy, and the machine rocked like a cradle on perpetual motion. So, I deemed it better to drop the Parramatta excursion, and make tracks for Penrith. All the way to seven Hills I had a nasty following wind, which kept bearing the machine towards the ground. I was alone in this fly, as I did not care about taking Jack up with me, owing to the peculiarity of the wind when we got to Parramatta. This was my second trip alone, and, finding the wind so much against me, I thought it not wise to run any undue risk, and I decided to take advantage of the clear paddocks to descend. I made a very good drop and pulled up in splendid order in Mr. George Best’s paddock. As the wind gave no promise of improving, I have roped her down, and hope to get her back to Penrith later in the day.

Mr. Hart built the whole of the woodwork of the machine himself.”.

From “The Sydney Morning Herald”, dated Monday 6 November 1911, we learn he did not get back to Penrith the same day as he hoped. The report reads in part:

**BY BIPLANE**

**ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL FLIGHT**

“The young Australian aviator Mr. W. hart, who on Friday made a successful flight with a passenger from Penrith to Parramatta by his biplane, completed the return journey early yesterday morning. Mr. Hart attempted to return to Penrith on Friday afternoon,



but owing to adverse conditions was compelled to descend at Seven Hills. The ascent yesterday was made with difficulty from a very small paddock, but with clever manoeuvring, Mr. Hart cleared all obstacles and at once rose to an altitude of 3000 feet. After circling round the old town of Parramatta, the biplane passed over Richmond and Windsor, and safely reached Penrith. The ascent was made at 5.46 a.m. and Penrith was reached 20 minutes later. The machine behaved splendidly throughout, and the aviator attracted considerable attention en route. Mr. Hart proposes to make several other flights before leaving for Tasmania.”.

Picking up the 1938 report again: - “Arriving over Parramatta Park, we attempted a descent, but being unacquainted with the difficulties associated with a right-hand turn, thinking that both right- and left-hand turns were equally easy, we turned to the right and thereafter, for some minutes, I remember nothing except being bumped and bounced all over the place, which was particularly risky as I was only seated on the edge of the wing. This suddenly stopped and I found myself close to a clear patch of ground at the back of Parramatta Park, where I managed to effect a good landing.”

The experience gave the brother a scare and he would have no more flying. Consequently, I made the return trip **alone**.” ... there’s that word again!

An article that has been obviously been taken from a Sydney newspaper is printed below. Country newspapers often relayed news that may of interest to their local audience and they would usually add something to give it relevance. This is good for historians as the city newspaper may not be available anymore.

**Lachlander and Condobolin and Western Districts Recorder – Wed, 15 Nov 1911 - p9**

### **The Flying Australian**

Mr. W.E. Hart, the pioneer Australian aviator, flew his aeroplane from Penrith to Parramatta, accompanied by his brother as a passenger, on Friday. The distance, 19 miles was accomplished in 19 minutes, which is in the neighbourhood of a record. Mr Hart learnt the art of flying only a few days ago and handles the machine skilfully and gracefully. Prior to his Parramatta flight he took Mr. C.S. Clancy, of “The Sun” staff, for a trip to the Blue Mountains, in the course of which a height of 2000ft. was obtained. The distance covered was 20 miles, and the machine behaved splendidly.

Mr. Hart will visit the various States and Tasmania to give exhibitions with his biplane. Before leaving he will give a short season of passenger flights at Penrith.

Mr. Hart is well known in the Wyalong district, and is the owner of several town properties at West Wyalong, where he practised as a dentist for a number of years. It does not appear that his expected “... visit to various States and Tasmania ...” eventuated.

Referring back to the paragraph where Bill describes the difficulty he had making a right-hand turn during his flight from Penrith to Parramatta, I consider some further comment on that manoeuvre is necessary.

Firstly, I would have expected his flying instructor, MacDonald, to have explained the different procedures required when making right hand and left hand turns and shown him during his training flights the different consequences in doing so. Moving ahead to Bill's flying tests later in November to qualify for his aviator's licence, how did he complete his figure 8 circuits, bearing in mind that MacDonald would only be available on 11 November before leaving Australia?

Secondly, Bill's explanation of his experience in making the right-hand turn is not consistent with more recent opinions of controlling a Boxkite when making such a turn in flight. Quoting Mike Jerram's statement from "Wings Encyclopaedia", in part: "... it was all but impossible to persuade a Boxkite to make a left-hand turn at all ...". The same statement appears in Mike Jerram's article published in the book, "In the Cockpit", published in 1991. More recently, Gary Sutherland states in his article, Henry Farman and his Boxkite", (Aviation Heritage, September 2011) that "Turns to the right were normal, but left turns sometimes resulted in much loss of height, often it was better to fly a 270-degree right hand turn than attempt a 90-degree left."!



*Bill Hart at the controls – (Flight Magazine)*

Therefore, it seems, after 27 years, Bill's memory recall, when he told his story in 1938, was at fault about the turn he made which he said caused him so much concern.

The first three days of November 1911 were special days in Bill's flying career. The evening of 1 November brought the local resident's challenge, and, in addition, he made

two passenger flights during the same day. Taking another extract from R.J. Gibson's talk on 29 October 1969: "I am not sure whether the passengers were ever rewarded for their bravery, but they most certainly should have been. Remember this was 1911, a flimsy aeroplane and a pilot of probably less than half an hour's solo experience."

R.J. Gibson continued: "But Hart was untroubled. These were early morning flights. With the whole day before him and a great sky to explore Hart decided to fly home for breakfast with his father in Parramatta taking his 16-year-old brother Jack as passenger. Taking off from Belmore Park, Penrith, at about 6.45 a.m., they flew to Parramatta Park in 19 minutes. One would think that this was a routine act when reading the report of the interview with Hart."

After breakfast, Bill started on his return journey to Penrith, but he experienced unfavourable flying weather over Seven Hills and decided he should not continue. In his own words, "I had to make for the nearest open ground, which happened to be a Chinaman's garden. The Chinese made a great fuss over their spoilt vegetables, and I had my first experience of paying for damage. In due course, I reached Penrith again in safety,".

He continues: "The return journey to Parramatta and back to Penrith was described in English and Continental papers at the time as a world's record."

This comment would have to be a memory lapse on his behalf!

Naturally, Bill's country supporters were always interested in his flying activities and their local newspapers kept their readers informed accordingly. For example, on this particular day, 'The Cootamundra Herald', an evening newspaper (sole proprietor, Frederick Pinkstone), published the following report, which, unfortunately, contains a number of errors of fact:

#### November 3, 1911. – **TODAY'S TELEGRAMS**

"William Hart, the Penrith aviator, this morning flew over the lower slopes of the Blue Mountains after circling round Richmond, Penrith and Parramatta. He traversed 18 miles in 19 minutes. The aeroplane was built by himself. Hart was very much troubled by wind pockets, which caused his machine to take several drops of about thirty yards. The aviator landed at Parramatta to avoid damage. The greatest height attained was three thousand feet."

The writer of the above telegram must have been very excited and confused with the facts of Bill's activities on the day, because it did not feature the day's highpoint – Bill's memorable flight from Penrith to Parramatta!

Moving forward to 1938, 'The Sydney Morning Herald', dated 5 February published an article advising that "A movement has begun in Parramatta to raise funds for the erection of a monument to commemorate the aeroplane flight by Mr. William Ewart

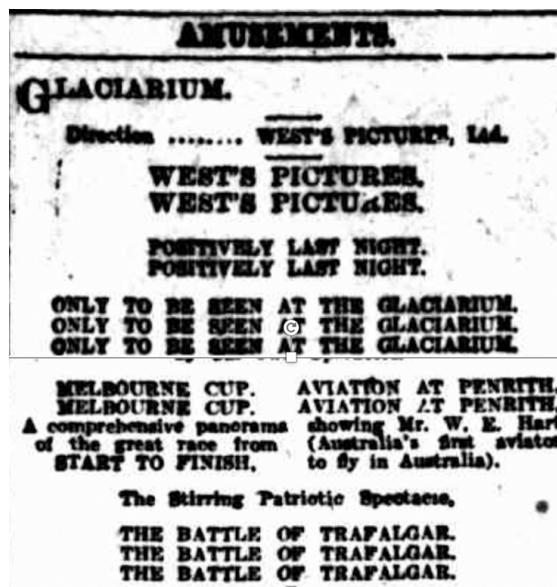
Hart from Sydney (sic – should be Penrith) to Parramatta in 1911. It was then the longest flight that had been made by **an Australian** in Australia.”.

In the course of time, at a regular meeting of the Parramatta National Park Trust on 4 July 1962, it was agreed that the money “... thought to be in hand ... for such monument ... be now allocated for the purpose,”. This resulted in a memorial being erected where Bill landed to commemorate the flight. It was unveiled on 16 June 1963, and among the people attending the ceremony was his widow, who travelled from Melbourne where she had lived since the early 1950s.

Unfortunately, the inscription on memorial contains a number of errors, including the date of the flight – should be 3 November 1911, not 4 November 1911 – which have yet to be corrected.

As well as the year 1911 being a “good year” for the phenomenon of powered flight in Australia, there was the other social development of the time – the silent moving film – and Hart’s activities with his Bristol Boxkite soon attracted the attention of the movie camera.

He first appeared in a “short” which was produced by T.J. West and shown at the Glaciarium Theatre, probably in November 1911, and included his “sensational” aeroplane flight over Penrith ... but more on the subject of **moving film** later.



*SMH – Glaciarium – West's Pictures - 17 Nov 1911*

Anxious to qualify for the Aviator’s Certificate, at some earlier time he had spoken to the Aerial League of Australia about applying to be tested for his ability to control an aeroplane in flight according to the rules of the Royal Aero Club of Great Britain. The Aerial League arranged for Lieutenant G. Taylor, Major C. Rosenthal, Captain Stowe

and Captain Vernon, all office bearers of the League, to supervise his flying tests in November 1911, at his Penrith base.

The test consisted of doing 10 figures of eight at an altitude of not less than 164 feet, a distance flight of 3 and half miles and every landing to be effected with the engine stopped before reaching the ground, and the machine to be brought to a standstill within 150 feet of the previously denoted spot.

On the day, the tests were cancelled due to adverse weather conditions.

Two days later, he completed some of the tests before the aircraft's propeller broke and slightly damaged the Boxkite, which was duly repaired.

Five days later, on Thursday, 16 November 1911, he completed the flying tests and became the first person in Australia to qualify for the aviator's Certificate from the aerial League. His flying ability during the tests impressed the Aerial league's examiners, particularly Major Charles Rosenthal, who allowed his 12-year-old son to fly as a passenger with Hart during the final, "... doing five figures of eight in splendid style." As quoted by the publication, *The Motor in Australia* dated 1 December 1911, 'AVIATION' section!



*W.E. Hart and 12yr old Master Charles Rosenthal (Photo: Keith White)*

**PENRITH. Thursday —M. Hart, the Penrith aviator, succeeded this morning in completing the Aerial Club's trial test for a pilot's certificate, viz., describing the figure eight five times. He was accompanied by a passenger, Master Rosenthal.**

**The time occupied in the evolutions, was 36 minutes. Young Rosenthal is only 12 years of age, and is a son of Major Rosenthal. He displayed exceptional nerve, and is the first Australian boy to ascend in an aeroplane.**

*Evening News - p5 - 16 Nov 1911*

As would be expected from such an enterprising young man, in his quieter moments leading up to the flying tests, he was thinking ahead, and one of his plans was another cross-country flight which he had expected to make at the end of September.

He contacted the secretary of the Royal Agricultural Society (R.A.S) who reported on 27 November 1911 to the Council that "I have also let the Ground to Mr. Hart for 14 days to exhibit his flying machine, but the season has not been successful, the weather having been unpropitious. The charge for the ground is the usual one of 10%." ... of the gross gate receipts.

Maintaining the momentum created by the publicity given to his aviation exploits to date, he announced he would make another cross-country flight from Penrith, this time to the R.A.S. Showground (now Centennial Parklands showring) at Moore park on Saturday, 18 November 1911.

'The Sydney Morning Herald' reported he left Penrith at 4.20 a.m. and continues: "The morning air was remarkably keen, and as the aviator rose steadily skywards the temperature fell proportionately, until he found himself shivering and almost numbed by the cold.

Rising speedily to an altitude of 6000 feet, Mr. Hart curved outwards in the direction of botany, following the line of the coast, the Heads, plainly discernible from such a height, offering an admirable landmark. The atmospheric conditions were not altogether what might have been desired. The wind was choppy, and the aeroplane more than once dropped into 'pockets', or hollows where the air was too rarefied to sustain it, with the result that it dropped each time a number of feet, before the aviator could find his level once more.

Maintaining a speed of nearly 50 miles an hour, Mr. Hart was not long in reaching Sydney, which, he declares, looked like a toy city extended beneath him. A small crowd of people had collected at the Agricultural Ground, Moore Park, where he was to alight, and as the aeroplane appeared a minute black dot against the sky the excitement was considerable."



He had arrived at the showground from Penrith, 47 miles away, 55 minutes later.

At least two newspapers published accounts of this flight, namely 'The Sun', 18 November 1911, and the 'Sydney Morning Herald', 1 December 1911. As well. Some 18 years later, the magazine, 'Flying', 1 December 1929, published an article by Bill, part of which included his account of the flight. All three have a number of variations from each other, but all agreed his flight was a great achievement ... "This is the longest voyage in the air that has been accomplished this side of the equator." ('The Sun', 18 November 1911).

Perhaps the 'Sydney Morning Herald' provided the best comment when describing Hart's landing at the Showground: "A golf enthusiast who was watching him approach and said: "He'll have to try a lofting shot over the bunker", which exactly described what the airman really did. Mr. Hart cleared the barrier with a beautiful rise and dropped on to the green as lightly as a bird."



*W.E. Hart coming into land right into Sydney Showground.  
The first and last landing of an aeroplane 18 Nov 1911. (Photo: Keith White)*

Another article, this time published by the magazine, The Motor in Australia, and headed 'Our AUSTRALIAN AVIATOR', stated that "During this flight, Mr. Hart ... alighting in the Royal Agricultural society's Show Ground ... cleverly dodging the flag poles and boards surrounding the Show Ground, jumping the scoring board, and landing with a superb volplane. It is doubtful whether a feat of landing in a small enclosure

under such unfavourable (sic) circumstances has before been attempted by an aviator. On the 21<sup>st</sup> ult. Mr. Hart essayed the difficult task of ascending from the Show Ground in a bad wind and after a run round the Sydney suburbs succeeded in alighting again in the Show Ground without accident. The weather on this occasion was very rough, and the aviator remarked that he had a bad time.”.

‘The Sydney Morning Herald’ published a second report headed:

### **IN A FOG ROUGH TIME ALOFT**

Subsequently Mr. Hart detailed to a “Herald” representative some of his experiences. “It’s very monotonous,” he said, “when all the conditions are favourable, just sitting still killing time. When we do strike capricious winds, your hands are so full maintaining an equilibrium that you haven’t time to think about anything else.” Regarding his trip on Saturday, Mr. Hart said he had previously mapped out the course he intended to take, but when he passed St. Mary’s at about 3000 feet he ran into fog, and his landmarks were shut out. To escape the fog he flew still higher, and the next landmark to come into view was the Prospect reservoir. He knew then he was on the right track. When over Granville at an altitude of about 5000 feet he encountered bad winds and much disturbance, which caused his aircraft to suddenly drop down considerably and bob up and down, and also caused it to rock a good deal. “I began to think I was going to have a pretty warm time,” he said, “before I reached the showground, and I certainly was not re-assured when I glanced down and saw smoke from the chimney stacks whirling about in all directions. I was about 6000 feet high when over Botany Bay, and it was difficult to believe that the little patch of curves and rhomboids and parallelograms down below was really Sydney. It seemed ridiculously small.”

The article continues: “This afternoon Mr. Hart intends to fly over Sydney, when he will be accompanied by Mr. Charles S. Clancy. Mr. Hart and Mr. Clancy also propose to fly from here to Melbourne shortly, provided sufficient inducement is offered by the intervening towns.” The flight to Melbourne did not eventuate.

In 1929, Bill wrote in his magazine article: “The feat has never been repeated. Numbers of airmen, who knew the high boards and stands which surround the ring, declare they would never attempt it, and neither would I, for that matter. I did it in sheer ignorance of its difficulties. I almost believe that, if photos were not in existence, there would be many to declare it was never done.”

Sadly, his memory failed him again on this occasion, because he flew out of and back into the Showground on 21 November (see below) as reported in the ‘The Sun’ newspaper on that day as follows.

## **LOCAL AVIATION MR HART'S LATEST FLIGHT**

“Mr. Hart, the Australian aviator, who flew from Penrith to the Show Ground on Saturday, made his first attempt out of the ground shortly after 5 o'clock this afternoon. He rose to an altitude of about 600 feet and after circling round Centennial Park, Randwick and Kensington, travelling a distance of about six miles, he descended into the Show Ground beautifully, jumping hoardings with ease. The weather conditions up above were too rough to permit of Mr. Hart carrying out his intentions of flying over the city.”.

Bill never seemed to miss an opportunity to advertise aviation and himself, for example, on the day following his successful flight to the Sydney Showground, ‘The Sun’ newspaper published the following advertisement in its sporting section:

### **AVIATION EXHIBITIONS**

**By W.E. HART,**

#### **AUSTRALIA'S INTREPID AVIATOR**

**EVERY AFTERNOON,  
ROYAL AGRICULTURAL GROUNDS, MOORE PARK.**

Admission, 1/-

Enclosure, 1/- extra

Gates open 3 p.m.

In the same magazine article as reported above, ‘The Motor in Australia’ asked Bill “... as to his intentions” to which he replied “... that he has arranged to fly from Sydney to Melbourne under the auspices of the Aerial League of Australia should suitable arrangements be made in the intervening towns and he hopes to arouse the interest of the Defence Department as to the possibilities of the aeroplane as a means of defence for this country. He proposes to give exhibitions in Melbourne, Brisbane and Tasmania, after which he will open aviation schools in Melbourne and Sydney. The machine which he is to use in Melbourne in connection with the school is being built by himself and his mechanics and is now practically completed, and except for a few alterations will be exactly the same type as the machine he is at present flying.”.

Bill did visit the defence Department in Melbourne later in December, unsuccessfully, but he did open an aviation school in Sydney at Penrith in the following month.

During the same interview, he was asked to describe his worst experience, which he “remarked” was landing in Parramatta Park after the flight from Penrith to visit his father for breakfast. When he was “... descending to alight in the Park he came suddenly upon gusty conditions which, had it not been for the fact of his descending and thus travelling at a very rapid rate would undoubtedly have overturned the machine. As it

was, he had considerable difficulty in controlling the machine.” This was the occasion describes elsewhere in which he said he mistakenly made a right-hand turn with very unpleasant results!

As his reputation grew, he was careful to emphasise the principle of safety in flying. He said he would rather put up a record for safety than circus flying.

(Daily Telegraph, page 11) - At a luncheon on Tuesday 28 November 1911, during the Parramatta Jubilee celebrations at which Bill was a guest speaker, the Mayor of Parramatta, Ald. Jago, “proposed a toast to Mr. Hart’s health ... and this proved to be one of the happiest inspirations of the day. It was received with tremendous cheering”. Mr. Jago said, **“Our young friend has brought us greater prominence than possibly anyone who has ever lived in the town,”** and at this there was renewed cheering”. “Mr Hart, his face wreathed with smiles, bore his honours modestly.”.

One of the features of the luncheon was the speech by Bill “who gave a very interesting and chatty description of his experiences in the air”, during which “he hinted at the possibility of training within the next 12 months a staff of aviators, who would be available for defence work.” Later during his talk, he said, from a height of “5000 or 6000 feet, the view you obtain of the surrounding country is remarkable ... so that will give you an idea of the possibilities of the aeroplane for reconnaissance and defence work ... I am hoping the Defence Department will take this matter up.”. He later “... explained that he had aspired to be the first Australian to fly over the city of Sydney, but so far the weather had been against him”. He continued, “people talk about the risks of flying. As a matter of fact, I get more excited in watching the cinematograph views of my flights than I do when actually in the air. (Laughter)”. Mr. Hart announced that on the previous Saturday he had received a very tempting offer to go to China and give exhibitions, but he resolved to decline it, “because he would a jolly-sight sooner stay in Australia.” (Cheers from the audience.)

The article ended with the statement, “Mr. Hart leaves Sydney by the Melbourne Express to-night, to interview the Federal Ministry on matters relating to aerial defence.”. The ‘Daily Telegraph’, dated 30 November, published an article, “Another ‘Fly’”. The previous morning flew over La Perouse and Botany Bay in awkward windy conditions which made it unsafe to attempt to fly over the city.”. He landed “in Victoria Park Racecourse, where the biplane is to be stationed (while not in flight) until Mr. Hart takes the machine to Brisbane.” ... did not eventuate. He was also “prepared to attempt a ‘fly’ over Sydney in the afternoon, but the wind was too strong. Next morning, 30 November, the ‘Daily Telegraph’ reported he made several flights from the racecourse, but not to any great height because of strong winds. On four of the flights, he carried a passenger, who included two of his sisters, one of whom (**Miss Cassie Hart**) became “the first Australian-born lady to make a journey through the air.”. as another report about these particular flights stated,” ... Miss Cassie’s courageous nature suggested the idea of a flight”, which was made “... at seven in the morning.”.



## CHAPTER 10

DECEMBER 1911

### RECOGNITION

Since 21 September 1911, when William Hart's Boxkite aeroplane arrived in Penrith, his natural talents had brought him from his first career in dentistry through to a new car business to his new career of both being the owner of a "flying machine" and the first person in Australia to qualify for an aviator's certificate, as well as establishing a flying field operation at Penrith.

In addition, he had, with help, virtually built his own aircraft following the destruction of his original Boxkite in a windstorm, and he had made two cross country flights from Penrith, firstly to Parramatta, and secondly to the Sydney Showground.

All this had been achieved in the time frame of two months. The print media, with just a brief exposure through the moving film newsreel, had been very generous in its praise of his aviation activities and feats, which the public had supported with warm and growing enthusiasm. I do not think such an achievement could be matched today.

On 2 December 1912, the "West Wyalong Advocate" reported that Bill's flight from Penrith to Parramatta was shown on film at Davy's Picture Theatre, West Wyalong.

## Mr Hart's Flight.

AT DAVYS' PICTURES

ODDFELLOWS' HALL  
**Every Monday Nigh**  
**DAVYS Pictures**  
Direct from Spencers Lyceum Theatre,  
Sydney  
**Front Seats 1s— Back 6d**  
Doors open 7.30. p.m. Commence 8  
**FRED DAVYS**  
Proprietor

MR W. E. HART, the Australian aviator, who has created a stir by his daring and successful biplane flights will be shown in his flight from Penrith to Sydney, at Davys' Pictures on Monday night, Mr Davys has secured this film at great expense, but there is little doubt that it will be a big draw.

The film has been attracting crowded houses in the city, and as Mr Hart is an ex-West Wyalongite we expect to see a bumper house.

There will also be the usual up to date programme.

On 5 December 1911, "The Sydney Morning Herald" published the following article:

“Honouring an airman. - The Aerial League of Australia will this afternoon, present Mr. Hart, the Parramatta airman, with a trophy and a certificate. Mr. Hart recently passed a severe test at the hands of the military aerial experts at Penrith, and, in view of the importance now attached to aero-plane (sic) scouting, and the need for encouraging airmanship in the Commonwealth, this evening’s gathering is regarded as having special significance from the standpoint of Australian aerial defence. The operations around Tripoli have demonstrated the practical utility of the biplane for reconnoitring purposes. The presentation will take place at the Royal society’s rooms, and addresses will be delivered by General Gordon (the state Commandant) Colonels Antill and Carrington, and by Mr. Holman (Attorney – General).

Parramatta, Mr. Hart’s native city, is immensely proud of his achievements, and at a public meeting held last night, at which the Mayor (alderman Jago) presided, it was decided to open a subscription list for a testimonial to young airman,”

The Herald’s report of the meeting next morning, 6 November 1911, read, in part: AUSTRALIA’S FIRST AVIATOR ... Presentation to Mr. Hart ... in view of the recent success of Mr. W.E. Hart in winning the first aerial test in Australia at the hands of the Aerial League of Australia, a meeting was held at the Royal Society room’s last evening to present Mr. Hart with a silver shield as a trophy, together with the certificate of the League. Colonel Vernon occupied the chair. A motion affirming the necessity for the immediate and serious consideration of the establishment of a system an aerial defence for Australia was moved by General Gordon, seconded by Captain Stowe, and supported by the Mayor of Parramatta.

The motion was carried unanimously.

It was decided that a copy of the resolution be forwarded to the Minster of Defence.

Colonel Vernon, who opened proceedings, said that this was somewhat of a red-letter day in the history of the League. The papers were full of what was being done elsewhere, and thanks to one or two men, Mr. Hart in particular, we had come to see aerial navigation carried on safely and easily in Australia.

Australia today, said Lieutenant G.A. Taylor, had a new sphere, that of the air. It won support of Mr. Joseph Cook, ex-Minister for Defence, to whose credit the offer a £5000 prize for an Australian military flier (sic) must be placed. The members of the League had spent over £2000 in experiments. **Mr. W.E. Hart, of Parramatta, a member of the League, was the first Australian to make cross-country flights, and had developed the art of flying to a degree of excellence.** His flight from Penrith to Sydney in a fog and during bad weather could not be excelled, and his winning of the first aviator’s certificate of this League was in itself proof of high qualifications. (Applause)

Mr. Hart, who was enthusiastically applauded, said he would like to say a little about high-flying. A lot of people still have the idea that if an engine went wrong while in the air that would be the end of the chapter. As a matter of fact, one was all right (sic) so



long as one had a suitable place for alighting. One could glide one mile for every 1000 feet of altitude. He himself would rather establish a record for safe and careful flying than for any circus performance. He recounted some of his early experiences in flying. The hardest thing he ever did was to wave his hand to "let go" on his first flight. He didn't feel "too chirpy", but it had to be done, and when he got up, he found it was not so bad after all. (Laughter) Mr. Hart leaves this evening for Melbourne, where he is to interview the Minister for Defence."

As reported in the above two articles from 'Sydney Morning Herald', it was considered at the time that the aeroplane's main role in society was to be as a weapon to be used in our country's national defence. During a talk Bill gave in late 1911, it was reported that he "hinted at the possibility of training within the next 12 months a staff of aviators who would be available for defence work.

In those relatively early days of aviation, the wonder flight was an experience enjoyed by only a very small number of people who flew as a pilot or a passenger of an aeroplane. It was considered a sporting activity and reported in the print media as such. The social and economic benefits which the aeroplane could bring to our relatively small population scattered across our very large, empty land were yet to be realised.

Overseas, military minds in a number of countries were starting to develop the aeroplane as a weapon of war. At the beginning of November 1911, less than eight years since man had achieved the new phenomenon of powered flight and during the Italo-Turkish War (1911-1912), Italy had sent an expeditionary army corps, which included nine military aircraft, to counter the Turkish occupation of Tripoli, Libya. Initially used for reconnaissance, the Italian aircraft later dropped a small quantity of grenades and cylindrical bombs on ground targets, the first-time aircraft were used as an offensive weapon, a small start for a new and terrible weapon of war.

On arrival in Melbourne, Bill Hart saw the acting Chief of the General staff at the Defence Department, who wrote to the secretary of the Department on 8 December 1911 and outlined two proposals which Bill had discussed with him. The first proposal was that the Government take over his aviation equipment, etc., and start a temporary training school, at an estimated cost of up to £3500, including one bi-plane complete and one bi-plane (less engine) pending the establishment of a permanent school of aviation. Estimates salaries would total £1062 p.a. including Bill Hart's of £750 p.a. He planned to train 25 officers a year.

His second proposal was that he keep his equipment and receive a fee of £100 for each officer trained by him and who received an aviator's certificate at the conclusion of such training.

However, other considerations coming from within the Department concerning aviation training for officers seemed to prevail, particularly the department's uncertainty about its future selection of aircraft. The Acting Chief of the General staff did recommend that six officers be selected for training under Bill Hart ... but nothing appears to have

happened until early 1914. (Please refer earlier section headed British and Colonial Aeroplane Company.)

As a follow-up to his visit to Melbourne, Bill wrote a letter dated 14 December 1911, to the Minister for defence, G. A. Pearce, stating, "Having reference to the interview which I had the honour to have last week on the subject of aviation, I have decided that if your department will assist me in the matter, I will open an Aviation School at Penrith, New south wales immediately.

There are a few Officers here whom I have booked as pupils, and I will have two Machines in perfect flying order at the school, which, given favourable conditions will allow of my turning out about ten Aviators per quarter.

If I can secure assistance of your Department, it is my intention to import a Monoplane so that I will be able to give tuition in both classes of Machines. I intend to run this school in a thoroughly efficient manner. I understand it is the intention of your Department to devote a sum towards the encouragement of Aviation. I would, therefore, be glad to know whether you are prepared to render me any assistance in the establishment of the School by giving me the instructing ... the Military Officers, or otherwise, as I am anxious to arrange this matter at an early date, I will be prepared to visit Melbourne with the object of interviewing you thereon.

I am

Yours faithfully.

(signed) W.E. Hart

The Minister wrote a side note on Bill's letter as follows:

To Secretary,

Please acknowledge and reply will be sent as soon as a decision arrived at, matter will be decided in a few days. G.F.P. 18/ 12/11

Like the lack of success by the British and Colonial Aeroplane Company and its Mission to sell Bristol Boxkites to the Federal Government, nothing came of Bill's attempt to establish a military flying training school. The Federal Government did commence to take action on 20 September 1912 when it approved the formation of a "Flying School and Corps".

However, not to be daunted, Bill proceeded with his plan to establish an aviation school – the first in Australia – at his base at Belmore Park, Penrith. This plan included inviting the Commonwealth Postmaster – General (PMG), Mr. C.G. Fraser, to officially open the school on 3 January 1912, which the PMG accepted.

No. 1.

Issued 5 Dec 1911



*This League recognised as the governing Authority  
of Aviation in Australia hereby Certifies that*

**William Ewart Hart :**

*Having fulfilled the conditions required by the Federation  
Aeronautique Internationale is qualified as an Aviator.*

*George A. Taylor*

George A. Taylor  
Hon. Secretary

*Allen Taylor*

Allen Taylor  
President

*We hereby Certify that the undermentioned tests were the undermentioned tests were faithfully carried out. Two distance flights of at least three miles. 185 yards each, in a closed circuit over a course marked by two posts 547 yards apart. After each turn round one of the posts - the aviator changed his direction when going round the second post, so that the circuits consisted of two series (uninterrupted) of five figures of eight. Alighting was done with the motor stopped before touching the ground, and the aeroplane came to rest within a distance of 100 feet from a point indicated. A minimum altitude of 164 feet was maintained.*

*W.L. Vernon*

W.L. Vernon.

*Charles Rosenthal*

Col. Charles Rosenthal, Major, A.F.A.

*F. Ernest Stowe*

F. Ernest Stowe,

Captain First Australian Light Horse

*George A. Taylor*

George A. Taylor

*Le Civic, Naval et. Les autorités militaires sont respectueusement  
Priées d'aider le travail de l'aviation du titulaire de ce certificate.*

*The Civic, Naval and Military Authorities are respectfully  
requested to aid the aviation work of the holder of this certificate.*



*Reproduction of Australian William Ewart Hart's No.1 Aviator's Certificate presented 5 December 1911*



## CHAPTER 11

JANUARY 1912

### A NEW DIRECTION

**“... a whole new voyage of discovery”.**

In implementing the plan to open his flying training school, Bill's work direction changed from being a pupil under instruction to being a teacher giving instruction, which was quite a change considering he had only qualified as a pilot in the previous November,

As a flying instructor, Bill would have described the features of his Boxkite to each of his pupils. No doubt, these would have included:

1. The Boxkite was powered by a 50h.p. Gnome rotary engine, which, when started, threw out oil (castor oil) from its exhaust on to the people holding the machine back.
2. Maximum speed in dead wind was 37 m.p.h. – motor cars on the road often passed a Boxkite in the air.
3. There is no throttle – the engine was either “full on” or “off”.
4. Its speed was regulated by a switch which broke the ignition circuit.
5. Altitude was read from an aneroid barometer suspended by a cord around the pilot's neck.
6. The pilot was seated on the front of the aircraft's lower wing had no protection from the weather. He could look down between his knees to the ground below.

Obviously, new pupils could have been hesitant to receive instruction from a new instructor, but, at the time of the school's opening, Bill said he had about a dozen pupils, one of whom, Major Charles Rosenthal, had been an official examiner during Bill's flying tests the previous November and had allowed his young son to fly with Bill on his last flying test.

As reported in 'Nepean Times', 6 January 1912, the opening of Bill's flying school at Penrith went ahead on schedule. The guest of honour, Mr. Frazer, Mrs Frazer and their party left Sydney by motor car at 4 a.m. on 3 January 1912, Why so early? It must be remembered that aircraft of the day were not strong or powerful, and flying was only undertaken when weather conditions were favourable. Early morning was usually an ideal time for flying.

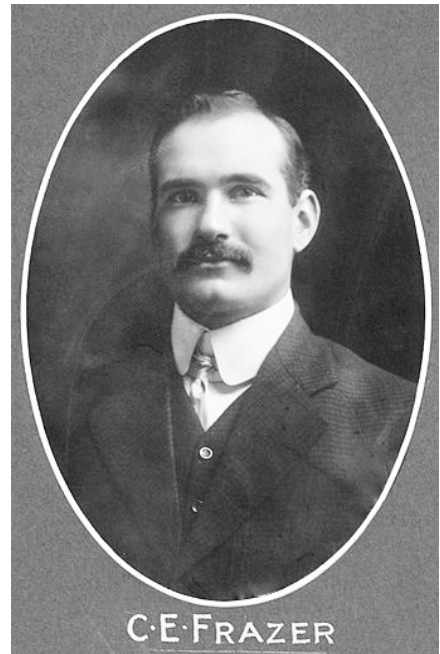
## A FLYING MINISTER.

### POSTMASTER-GENERAL AMONG THE CLOUDS.

#### ASCENT AT PENRITH.

#### MRS. FRAZER MAKES AN AERIAL TRIP.

Prior to the opening of Mr. Hart's aviation school at Penrith this morning, the Postmaster-General (Mr. Frazer) paid a visit to the school, accompanied by Mrs. Fraser, and subsequently made a flight with Mr. Hart lasting for about 10 minutes, in which time a distance of something like five miles was covered, the altitude being about 300ft. Fine weather was experienced throughout the trip.



*The Sun - 3 Jan 1912 - A Flying Minister*

*Charles Edward Frazer (1880–1913) – (NLA)*

When the official party arrived at Belmore Park, Bill had all the preparations in readiness for the school's opening, including an official flight. This must be one of the earliest official openings ever arranged and was completed by about 6 a.m. when the order was given to let go "... and the next moment Bill and the PMG were careering through the air at a rate of about a mile a minute. They travelled about 6 miles at an average altitude of 600 feet."

The PMG was the first minister of the government to make a flight. On landing, his enjoyment of the flight encouraged Mrs. Frazer, who decided to take a flight, which her husband thought was a little longer than his!

Remembering how few people had flown at the time, it is perhaps opportune to repeat some of the PMG's comments after the flight, as reported in 'The Nepean Times':

FRAZER: While I felt a little doubtful about the project as I was going up in the motor car, when I got up in the aeroplane, I did not feel much doubt about it at all.

It produced rather an attractive sensation. I naturally for a moment or two watched Mr. Hart very carefully; but when I saw the way he was manipulating the machine I became quite at ease.

I may make this remark in connection with my experience, I think Australia is very fortunate in having such a reliable, capable aviator as Mr. Hart undoubtedly is, and who has advanced the science of aeronautics here to the stage it has reached at the present time. **A man of his stamp** (Very appropriate as Frazer was considering introducing Australian stamps and Billy was ever ready to begin an airmail service - Ed) may be of very valuable assistance in the event of any emergency. I cannot speak too highly of the opinion I entertain of his reliability and judgement.

... I am very pleased to know we have a chap like Mr. Hart here. He takes no risks and does not indulge in any show business. He simply conducts the trip from beginning to end to perfection.

On Saturday 6 January 1912, just three days after the opening of his aviation school, Bill was involved in an aeroplane accident variously headlined in the print media over the years as follows:

6 Jan 1912: Aeroplane Mishap / Mr. Hart and passengers / thrown from seats.

Later Printing - 13 Jan 1913: The flying machine / collides with a signal post / at Mount Druitt

Later Printing - 1 Nov 1965: Freak landing shocked staff

Later Printing - 24 Nov 1976: Australia's first air crash / ended on rails

Later Printing - 22 May 1980: Flying dentist buzzed / top express.

The passage of time from the actual event seems to have introduced an element of sensationalism into the headlines for the accident when rewritten in the media.

All the articles which followed the above headlines were reporting on the same accident which occurred when Bill was flying the Boxkite from Penrith to Parramatta to take Major Rosenthal, who weighed 18 stone as a passenger. One article reported the Major was sitting on the biplane's wing alongside Bill, and another reported the Major "... was centred on a kind of elevated dickey seat, which draped his hefty legs about the pilot's shoulders." Bill had arranged to take the Major to review in Parramatta Park at which the Governor was to be present.

The Boxkite became different to handle when it met adverse winds near Mount Druitt Railway station. It gradually lost height, and Bill elected to make a landing alongside the railway line. Unfortunately, as he endeavoured to steer his biplane between signal posts, the aircraft canvas wing hit a post and the aircraft capsized, throwing both men clear of the damaged aircraft. They suffered only minor injuries, and Major Rosenthal was able to continue his journey by rail to Parramatta, where a large crowd, disappointed with the delay caused by the crash and now dispersed, had been waiting the arrival of the aircraft and its "youthful aviator."

This was our first aircraft crash ... for Bill and for Australian aviation!

Whilst Bill was endeavouring to land his Boxkite, The Blue Mountains Express was travelling towards Penrith and approaching Mount Druitt Railway Station. When the driver saw the aircraft in some distress, he was heard to comment: "It's that mad Parramatta dentist, Bill Hart."

It is reported that at least one passenger in the passing train would have been pleased to know that the aviator had not been hurt. The passenger was Mrs. William Hart, the aviator's mother.

The Railways Department was "... not amused ...", but later accepted Bill's apology.



'The Nepean Times', published Saturday, 13 January 1912, reported "The machine was brought back to Penrith (another report said Parramatta), where repairs were commenced at once. Mr. Hart has since decided on making a trip to New Zealand, where he will give exhibition flights. Everything was packed up and sent from Penrith on Thursday. Mr. Hart expects to be away only a few weeks." His trip does not appear to have eventuated.

Nor does it appear that Major Rosenthal ever qualified for a pilot's licence. In the Major's biography (entitled 'Major General Sir Charles Rosenthal' and published in the Victorian Historical Magazine, Vol.40 No.3 August 1969) his biographer, Warren Perry, write that the major said he had his ..." first crash with Mr. Hart.". Perry continues that "This last comment suggests that he had been in other crashes, but no evidence of other crashes has been found.". Furthermore, no other mention of any further flying activity involving Bill Hart is made in the Major's biography.".

The following quote is from a more recent but unsourced article about the crash:

"The plane appeared to be a total wreck, but Mr. Hart was not concerned ... he told the papers that with a pot of glue, some fresh wire and canvas, he would soon have it as good as new.

Since the trip to New Zealand didn't eventuate, where did Bill and his aeroplane go? What happened to the flying school in his absence? "The Nepean times" did not report any activity, flying or otherwise, concerning him for the remainder of the month of January 1912!



*Major General Sir Charles Rosenthal KCB CMG DSO*

*1875-1954 – (Australian War Memorial)*



## CHAPTER 12

### AVIATION GROUNDS

**FEBRUARY 1912 - “The lusty infant had outgrown its cradle”.**

The above is another quote by Mr. R. Gibson, a former president of the Aviation Historical society of Australia (NSW) Inc., from his 1969 paper, ‘The Penrith – Richmond Area – A Cradle of Aviation’.

Bill Hart’s movements following his aeroplane crash at Mount Druitt and the non-event “trip to New Zealand” do not seem to have received any media attention. Perhaps word of the proposed move of his aviation base from Penrith to Richmond had found its way to the way to the ears of what would have been a very disappointed local media. Although his base at Belmore Park, Penrith, had been adequate for his activities to date, Bill became aware of a flood-free plateau between nearby Richmond and Windsor, known as Ham Common (also known as Richmond Common), which he described as being **“the finest site in Australia for an aviation ground”**. He applied to the Richmond Council to use the area for his aviation operations, and, during February 1912, was granted permission to use the area.

As a result, he prepared to move his aviation operations from Penrith to Ham Common, where he proposed to build sheds “for several machines” on the land, and even had expectations of establishing an aeroplane factory there should his flying school prove successful.



Even though his plans for developing the Ham Common operation were short-lived following his serious accident in September 1912, his foresight in choosing the area for aviation use has been justified in subsequent years. Various operations, including the N.S.W State Aviation School, 1915-1918 and beyond, used the area which was eventually taken over by the Federal Government in 1923, and, with expansion, became what we now know as RAAF Base, Richmond. There appears to be no information about Bill Hart's flying school or other activities during the month of February. Certainly, no reports of Bill and his activities could be found in Penrith's own newspaper, 'Nepean Times'.

This is the Bill Hart story for the month of February 1912, commenced with the statement: "The lusty infant had outgrown its cradle.". Bill had developed the potential to go forward and relocating his activities to a new base at Ham Common would give him that opportunity.



## CHAPTER 13

### A NEW START

#### MARCH 1912

At this point, it seemed Bill Hart had drawn the line in the sand and put his time at Penrith behind him, but he took all the aviation experience learned at Penrith with him to Ham Common.

Sometime during the early months of 2012, I was told authoritatively that he moved his operation to Ham Common following an approach from Richmond Council to do so. This may be correct, but, as you the reader will appreciate, regardless of why he moved, the fact is he did move, which, I believe, in the long term, was beneficial to our aviation development in those days.

I don't know how many assistants Bill had and whether they were volunteers or paid employees, or a mixture of both, but the move would have been quite a project for him and his team, particularly clearing the land for the new airfield, but it would have been a major attraction to the people of Richmond and the surrounding district. You can imagine the excitement on 4 March 1912, when his boxkite biplane arrived ... by train at Richmond Railway Station. An article published in the magazine, 'The Motor in Australia,' dated 2 April 1912, reported that the airfield "will soon be ready for the public's inspection."

Aviator Hart sent one of his aeroplanes to Richmond last week by rail and it was taken to Ham Common on Monday. Mr Hart has been granted permission to use this stretch of country as an aerial ground, and has made application to the Richmond Municipal Council for authority to erect cover-sheds for several machines. Mr Hart has floated a company to be known as Hart's Aviation Company, and the establishment of an aerial school on Ham Common is being proceeded with. It is proposed to establish an aeroplane factory there, should the school prove the success anticipated. The Company will have a

capital of £3000, made up of 3000 shares at £1 each. It is estimated that the revenue from exhibitions in different States will bring in a revenue of £3,750 per annum, pupils' fees £900, passenger flights at £5/5/- each £546; total revenue per annum less £624, expenses £5,196. It is very probable that the name of the popular old common will die a natural death and the miniature plain will assume a more aristocratic designation such as the Clarendon Aerial Grounds.

*Windsor & Richmond Gazette - 9 March 1912 - p10*

On 9 March 1912, it was reported that a company prospectus had been issued in the name of Hart's Aviation Company Limited, which was being formed to takeover and carry on as a going concern the business at 65 Market Street, Sydney, known as Hart's Aviation School. The nominal capital of the new company was to be £3000 divided into 3000 shares of £1 each. Bill Hart would be allocated 1250 shares for plant and machinery plus 650 shares for the goodwill of the business and existing contracts. Other

subscribers to the new company included his father, his business manager, Charles Clancy and Richard Stanton, a real estate agent.

Among the objects of the new company was the clause: "To establish depots and agencies in different parts of Australia and elsewhere and to promote race meetings and speed and test trials for aviators, motorists, cyclists and others and to offer and donate for competition and distribute prizes... ". Quite ambitious, and his air race against the American, Wizard Stone, which was held on 29 June 1912, was probably the only event held under this clause.

According to the Parnell / Boughton Bicentennial Project, 'Flypast', in 1988, estimates of "revenue from exhibitions in different states would bring in £3750 p.a., pupils' fees £900, 100 passenger flight @ £5.50, total revenue £5200 less £624 to cover expenses."

One very interested local was a schoolboy names Edgar Wikner Percival, born 23 February 1897, and lived with his parents on a nearby property. Young Edgar became a very eager assistant, helping with the early morning flights from the airfield. One story about him was that he would often be late bringing in the family cattle because he was watching and / or involved in airfield activities. He had an absorbing ambition to fly with Bill.

Edgar pursued a career in aviation, mainly in England. He became a well-known pilot and designed and built the famous Percival range of aircraft, including the Mew Gull, and in 1936, was the recipient of the Oswald Watt Gold Medal – but that is another story!



*Edgar Wikner Percival – (NLA)  
(1897 – 1984)*



On 29 March 1912, Bill's Boxkite "was to have gone up at noon that day", so rumour said. Rumour was wrong. The wings were not ready." (Hawkesbury Herald)

<u>Fédération Aéronautique Internationale</u>	
<u>British Empire</u>	
We the undersigned,	Nous soussignés
recognised by the	pouvons attester
F.A.I. as the	reconnu par la
Sporting authority,	F.A.I. pour la
In the British Empire	Empire Britannique
certify that,	certifions que
<u>William Ewart Hart</u>	
Born at <u>Parramatta, NSW</u> on the <u>20th April, 1885</u>	
Having fulfilled all	Ayant rempli toutes
The conditions stipulated,	les conditions
by the F.A.I. has imposed	imposées par la
been granted an	F.A.I. a ce brevet
AVIATOR'S CERTIFICATE.	PILOTE - AVIATEUR.
THE ROYAL AERO CLUB OF THE UNITED KINGDOM	
<u>C.D. Rose</u>	Chairman
<u>Harold C. Perrin</u>	Secretary
Date. <u>26th March, 1912.</u>	No. <u>199</u>



W. E. Hart  
(Signature of Holder)

Reproduction of William Ewart Hart's Royal Aero Club Aviator Certificate No.199 – 26 March 1912





## CHAPTER 14

### BILL'S REPUTATION GROWS

#### APRIL 1912

The interest from the community at Richmond and its surrounding area in bill's aviation activities at his new base had grown through the previous month of March. It reached a peak on 3 April 1912, when Bill and his Boxkite flew for the first time from Ham Common and continued to make many flights during the day.

Next day, the local newspaper, 'Hawkesbury Herald', published a wonderful word picture of the previous day's exciting activities, A selection of quotes from the article follows:

"... Yesterday was an interesting day for Richmond, the flying machine went up. Everyone was out to see it! **All the schools were let loose**, and for a time business was suspended in many of the shops, so keen was the interest displayed. Hundreds gathered up on the town common, where for weeks, in a large tent, the mechanics had been putting the biplane together. There had been few false alarms. Particularly so last Friday. It was to have gone up at noon that day, so rumour said. Rumour was wrong ..."

"... when, next morning, word was passed around that a flight was due to be made about 10 o'clock, the excitement commenced, and a stream of hurtling townsfolk set in commonwards. (sic)'

"... it was after 11 by the time the front of the tent was hauled up and the great bird was at last wheeled out of its cage to taste the fresh air."

"... Hang on to her till I get the engine going well," cried the captain. And several willing men grasped the rear part. The Gnome spun round – you could not see the blades, and those behind had their hats blown off with the air current created."

"... Let go!"

"... Away she went. Like a young bird running along preparatory to flight, she did 50 yards or so, then lifted, dipped to the earth again, and had another try, and when the feathers were felt properly, up she went, the crowd cheered."

"... Marvellous! Wonderful! What control! Lands safe enough!" "These were some of the exclamations heard ...".

"... As the last two (passengers) got into the together, there was jocular remarks as to the unlucky number. The next will be the fourteenth!" he said.

The excitement of aviation, and all that goes with it, had arrived at Ham Common!

**Our Aviator.**

Mr. Hart made thirteen successful flights in his biplane at Richmond, on Wednesday, from the newly-appointed aerial ground on Ham Common. On one occasion he took his sister, Miss Winnie Hart, as a passenger. Miss Atkins, several directors of the Aerial Company, various visiting and local pressmen, and Alderman Waters, Mayor of Richmond, were also taken for flights. The highest altitude reached was about 200 feet.

*Cumberland Argus - 6 April 1912 - p6*

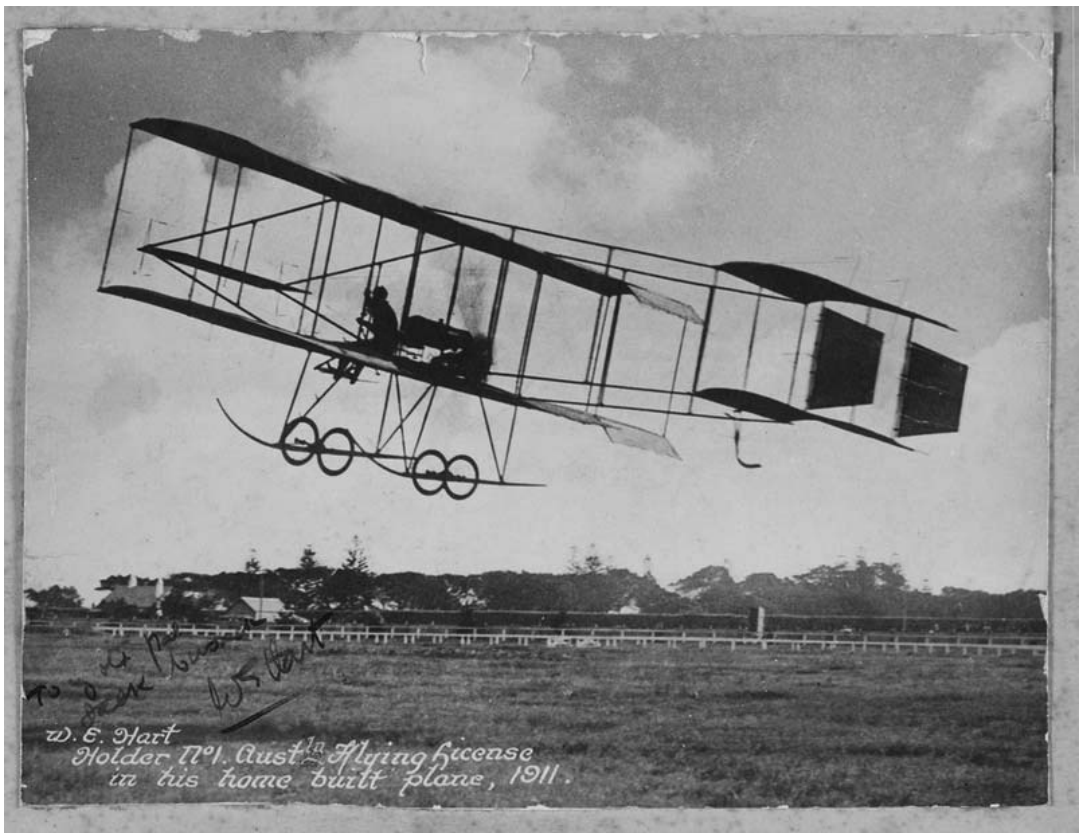
On 14 April 1912, Bill received a challenge from an American aviator, Arthur Burr "Wizard" Stone, to compete against each other in three air races - Sydney to Parramatta and return, Sydney to Newcastle and return and Sydney to Melbourne or vice-versa.

A.B. Stone (1874-1943) was already recognised in France where he learned to fly and subsequently in the USA where he received the Aero Club of America's Certificate No.15 for his flying ability. Before this, he had gained a reputation as a cyclist and later as a trick motor cyclist performing loops in a steel sphere (40 feet in diameter and known as the "The Globe of Death") with his wife sitting behind him. In 1912, he and his wife came here under contract to Philip Lytton for a combined theatrical and barnstorming tour of Australia and New Zealand and brought out his Metz-Bleriot aeroplane with two sets of mainplanes.

I do not know whether Bill had any prior knowledge Of Stone's background, but, on 22 April, he accepted the latter's challenge over any distance under reasonable conditions. Only the Sydney to Parramatta and return race eventuated. The two pilots were to race for a stake of £259 each, winner takes all. The race was scheduled to be held on Saturday, 15 June, from Ascot Racecourse (resumed in 1947 and now part of the east-west runway at Sydney international Airport) to Rosehill Recourse and return.



*Arthur "Wizard" Stone in the cockpit of his Bleriot - (NLA)*



(State Library of NSW)

*W. E. Hart, Holder No. 1 Australian Flying Licence in his home-built plane, 1911. The photo is inscribed "To my old pal Jack Cusack, W. E. Hart". Hart had extensively rebuilt the Boxkite No. 10 after it was damaged in a windstorm. Note that Hart is holding on to a strut with his left hand, while climbing and correcting a starboard wing drop. It can be seen that pitch control linkages are fitted both to the front elevator and to the upper rear elevator only.*

According to the 1967 publication of 'Aussies Air Stories', "... Stone had already generated a charisma, thanks to a press which exaggerated his aviation exploits." Another statement in the same publication suggested that "... Stone was to the aviation world of Australia in 1912 what spacewalk astronauts are today." Other comments were "If the turn of the century publicists had thought of it, they would have dubbed the race 'The America's Cup of the Air', such was the hype that surrounded the race ..." and "It was the charisma that brought sports fans in their thousands out to ascot Racecourse to see this **first Australian Air Race**,". Like Bill, Stone had experienced accidents during his flying career, one of which hospitalised him for 10 weeks. A saying of the day was that "no pilot is any good until he has broken wood."

Following the announcement of the air race, C.C. Spencer, one of three film producers in Sydney, judged there would be considerable interest in a film featuring at least one of the participants, and it would be no surprise that Bill Hart was the one.

Spencer arranged for Ernest Higgins, his chief cinematographer, to fly with Bill to make a full-length feature film entitled 'The Camera in the Clouds', which he claimed was the first ever series of moving film, 2000 feet in length, taken from an aeroplane.

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**Spencer's Pictures, Ltd., always to the fore in local production, screened at the Lyceum yesterday the first series of moving pictures taken from an aeroplane. Without leaving their seats the spectators, who filled the commodious theatre, were able to float through space, so realistically had the camera performed its task. "The Camera in the Clouds"—to use the title of the picture—was taken by Mr. Ernest Higgins from a biplane driven by Australia's first airman, W. E. Hart. Several months ago Spencer's, despite previous failures—and they were legion—determined to show on their screen how the world below looked from an aeroplane, and arranged a contract with Mr. Hart's company for a number of flights. The work of taking the film covered over a month, during which period the camera went aloft six times. The result reflects great credit on Mr. Higgins, whose work in picturing "Sweet Nell of Old Drury" will be remembered. The photographs were taken over the Richmond, Clarendon, and Windsor districts at varying altitudes. The remainder of the programme comprised "Ronneby, South Sweden," "The Struggle," "The Conjuror's Triumph," Pathe's "Australian Animated Gazette," "The Punishment," "The Magnetic Flute," "Studies of Kittens," "Getting a Hired Girl," "False to Both," and "Dupin Goes Mountaineering." Tomorrow night all sections will contain new features to supplement "The Camera in the Clouds," which will be shown all the week, with a matinee on Wednesday.**

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16 June 1912 - The Sun - Spencer Pictures



*Ernest Henry Higgins – NFSA*

With appropriate advertising, e.g. “How it feels to fly through the air with Airman Hart ... Australia’s Pioneer Airman”, Spencer timed his film for release in the city at the Lyceum theatre on 15 June 1912, the day set down for the air race.

Meanwhile, Bill’s new company, Hart’s aviation Company Limited, was registered on 26 April 1912. I wonder what, if any, insurance cover he had on aviation activities!



## CHAPTER 15

### TWO FIRSTS FOR BILL: INTERNATIONAL AIR RACE AND LITIGATION

MAY 1912

On 8 May 1912, 'The Sydney Morning Herald' published the following report:

"Yesterday afternoon arrangements were completed for the first aerial contest in Australia and the participants will be W.E. Hart, the Australian airman, with his biplane and 'Wizard' A.B. Stone, the daring American, with his monoplane. The contest will cover a side wager of £250 and will take place over a course from Sydney to Parramatta and return, on a date to be decided upon, but which will in all probability be either Empire Day or June 3.

After a lengthy sitting yesterday the main points governing the contest were agreed upon, Mr Dan Shafer, representing 'Wizard' Stone, eventually signing the necessary contract with aviator Hart, on behalf of Hart's Aviation Company. The finish of the contest will be marked at a spot on a suitable ground within the metropolitan area, to be mutually selected and the rules of the Aero Club of Great Britain will govern the race. The agreement provides that a referee shall be appointed by both contestants, but, failing an agreement in this respect, **Mr. Philip Lytton** has been asked to name the official. The remaining officials necessary to control the contest will be appointed by the Aviation Company of Australia ..." (The last-named company should have been named the 'Aerial League of Australia' – Ed)



*Mr. Philip Lytton - Entrepreneur, publisher, acting teacher – (NLA)*



But perhaps the item of most immediate interest about Bill Hart during the month of May 1912, concerned the outcome of his involvement in an earlier incident which occurred whilst he was based at Penrith, when, it is reported, he and his Boxkite aircraft made several flights lasting about an hour over a dairy and stampeded a herd of cows.

As reported in the 'Sydney Morning Herald' on 10 May 1912, he had been sued in the Sydney District Court by Hugh Byrne, of the Elizabeth Dairy, Epsom Road, Waterloo, who claimed " ... that the defendant propelled an aeroplane over, upon and against his land, on which his dairy cows were depasturing (sic), made a great noise and disturbance with the machine, and thereby frightened, disturbed and stampeded the herd, with the result that two of the cows were killed, and others injured, besides which the supply of milk was greatly diminished, and he was hindered and disturbed in carrying on his business, Plaintiff further claimed that the defendant broke and entered on his premises wherein the cows were being depastured."

This was the first claim of its kind to be made in Australia ... and, of course, another first to Bill Hart. It must be remembered that there were no air traffic regulations operating in 1912.



*Photographic re-enactment of cattle stampede*

The plaintiff said in evidence that he ... "had an interview with Hart, when he offered to accept £10 in satisfaction. Hart said he would send his manager along to settle the claim, but the appointment was not kept."

“His Honour said the plaintiff was not now necessarily bound to that offer. It might be reasonable one at the time when the expenses of a lawsuit (sic) were to be considered.”.

Some extracts from that section of the report covering Bill's defence follow: ... “It was not an actionable wrong for an aviator to pass over a man's land.” ... “On no other occasion had complaints of stock being frightened been made, excepting at Penrith, when a racehorse owner asked him to make a detour. Stock as a rule did not take any notice. Fowls and chickens took fright, as they seemed to think that the machine was a hawk. There was not much sound from the machine – not nearly as bad as a motor-cycle racing. He did not notice the plaintiff's cattle stampeding.”. ... “He certainly did not think it would be safe to fly at a lower level than 200ft at the spot referred to. He could only not recollect passing over the plaintiff's farm ...”. ... “At Richmond, where he occasionally flies, the cattle try to chase the machine rather than being frightened ...”.

His Honour said the question to settle was narrowed down to the height of the machine at the time. As far as he could see, **it was not a case of trespass**, but he did not bind himself to that. He gave a verdict for the amount claimed.

That evening, Bill is reported to have said: “The decision is a serious one for aviators. I will fulfil my present engagements, but it is my intention not to take part in any other flights until the decision has been finally tested ... the legal risks are too great. If the verdict is held correct, it will retard aviation in Australia very seriously indeed.”.

Bill Hart was a member of the Aerial League of Australia, and from the minutes of a council meeting of the League, held on 18 May 1912, we learn that: “The hon. Secretary reported that Aviator Hart had been defendant in a case claiming for damage done to some cattle through flying over them. The plaintiff based his case on two points. 1<sup>st</sup> that the Aviator had trespassed by flying over his ground, and 2<sup>nd</sup> that certain damage was done to the cattle thereby.”.

Judge Backhouse waved the charge of trespass and made the plaintiff confine his claim to one of common damage. The aviator was therefore mulct (sic) in the sum of £20. (ORIGIN: late 15th century: from Latin *mulctare*, *multare*, from *mulcta* ‘a fine’ - Ed) The League was not advised of the impending action, and the information was only obtained from the daily press when the case was settled. Mr. Hart then asked the League to exert itself on his behalf. Mr. Hart was rather late in seeking the assistance of the league, and, furthermore, the question raised by Mr. Hart that this case would prejudice aviation was hardly tenable in view of the judge having waived the charge of trespass.

The council agreed to following motion: “That this League sympathises with Mr Hart but on the question of trespass was not involved it does not consider the verdict will effect aviation in Australia. The League also regret that it was not advised prior to the case coming on.”.

Two months later, the Wagga Wagga newspaper, ‘The Daily Advertiser’, on July 9, 1912, published the following news item:

## **Aeronaut's Liability The Scaring of Stock Farmer Recovers Damages**

“Paris, France: The Civil Court has ordered M. Farman, the famous aeronaut, to indemnify a farmer for the damages caused to his stock through an aeroplane alighting upon his farm and causing animals to injure themselves in a stampede.”.

A variation to this problem is mentioned in Sir Hubert Wilkin's autobiography of the same name (published 1961/62) In 1921, Sir Hubert was aboard the British airship R34 to gain experience to pass an air-navigator test. Weather had delayed the airship from landing. He used the time to practise observing from the air. “When we tired of this, we amused ourselves by betting on the chickens that raced across the fields, running away from our shadows.” ... and perhaps the engine noise as well!

In the same book, this time in 1929, again in an airship, the Graf Zeppelin, and flying over Soviet Asia, he commented: “It was strange to watch these people bolting at the approach of the Zeppelin, like the chicken and cattle in other countries.”.

Malcolm Andrews, in his book, ‘Hubert Who?’, published 2011, quotes Sir Hubert as saying ... “We could see frantic mothers grabbing their children and fleeing into their houses ... Peasants would jump out of their ox-wagons and run behind trees.”.

Even today, light aircraft must fly at a minimum of 1500 feet over a built-up area ... the aircraft noise continues! (Drones in Australia do have regulations, so check for updates. However, currently there are a few areas where you aren't able to fly above, including private property, event venues that are operating, prisons, government properties, national parks, and marine parks. Also, no drones within 5.5kms of an airport except if you have commercial licence. – Ed)

## **BUILDING A NEW AEROPLANE**

About this time, Bill Hart was joined by Sydney born Frederick Esk Sandford (1890-1928), who was an engineer and draughtsman. Frederick assisted Bill in the design and construction of a new aeroplane in Hart senior's timberyard at Parramatta. (He died from a motor car accident on the Melbourne – Sydney road - Ed)

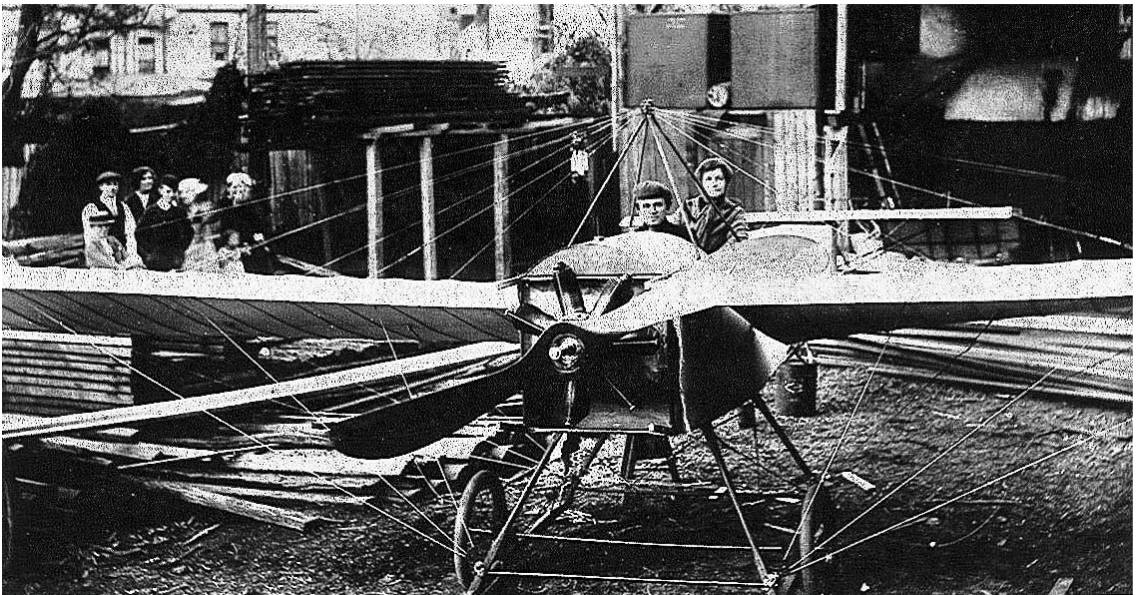


*Lt. Frederick Esk Sandford*

**SANDFORD.—December 15, 1928, accidentally killed at Wangaratta, Victoria, Frederick Esk, Squadron-Leader, A.F.C., R.A.A.F., youngest son of William and Caroline Sandford, of Eastwood, aged 37 years.**

Later he attained the rank of Squadron-Leader.

Having made that statement and without the availability of Bill's business records, the question must be asked: Whilst Bill and Esk Sanford, and probably others, were at Parramatta working on the new aeroplane, who was 'looking after the shop' at Ham Common? The magazine, 'Flying', 22 December 1929, (republished in December 1954) reported Bill talking about his new project, "One of my ventures in aeroplane construction was a 'pusher' monoplane, which I believed was going to be the fastest to date. It was cut down so fine that it would not leave the ground. It did rise once, when it hit a bump in the flying field and hopped a few feet, but it collapsed in a heap when it touched the ground again. I was told that ... Sanford, who helped me build her, went into transports of enthusiasm when he saw her off the ground. Turning to the mechanic who was standing at his side, he cried, 'Look at it! Look at it!' 'Yes,' answered the mechanic, who had not taken his eyes off the machine. 'Look at it now', and poor Sanford's next sight was a total wreck.' We wrote 'finis' to that effort by removing the engine and pouring petrol around the wreckage, which we fired."



***The Hart two-seat tractor monoplane being assembled in his father's timber yard. The propeller not yet reversed for pulling rather than pushing. On its third flight the aircraft fell uncontrollably from 200 feet; Hart was seriously injured, and the incident ended his flying career. Bill Hart with his mother. (NLA)***

"I then constructed a passenger-carrying machine which flew very well. About this time, I had moved to Richmond common where the Federal Aerodrome now stands, and many flights were made from there. One day the machine went into a spin owing to an oversight on the part of the mechanic and I crashed from 200 feet and that ended my career as a flyer."

Bill covered a lot of time in that last paragraph as the last sentence refers to his crash which occurred on 4 September 1912.

Meanwhile, his preparations for the air race against 'Wizard' Stone in June 1912, continued with an announcement on 18 May that the secretary of the Aerial League of Australia would appoint supervisors for the race.

Before closing the story of Bill's activities during the month of May, you have probably noticed that I have hardly mentioned the flying school since reporting it was opened in January 1912. Also, I may have given the impression that these activities evolved around him with little or no outside support, but it does seem that, if he were not in attendance, everything stopped.

For example, who continued training of his pupils?

He would have had to have help to maintain the records of the daily operations of his business, both at Penrith, later at Ham Common, and even at his father's timberyard! Some brief mention of a few of these matters: records of students' progress in training for their aviation certificates, erection of hangar/s, records of joy flights, visitors to his bases at Penrith and Ham Common, staffing, cash control, travel between his home and his base and so it goes on ... too many more to mention here!

So, who has been helping him run his business? As we know, the print media concentrated on him ... after all, he was the centre of their interest!

We know initially, there was L.F. MacDonald on the flying side, then C.S. Clancy was engaged as manager, but he could not do everything, and I hesitate to mention Edgar Percival, his young neighbour ... willing though he may have been to learn?

Maybe someday we will know...



## CHAPTER 16

### THE INTERNATIONAL AIR RACE

#### JUNE 1912

The month of June 1912 was destined to be the high point in Bill's Hart aviation career. To date, he had had many firsts to his credit in Australian aviation. But the anticipation of the air race against the American, 'Wizard' Stone, would challenge his determination and skill as an aviator like nothing else in his short flying career.

On 8 May, 'The Sydney Morning Herald' had reported that, "After a lengthy sitting yesterday the main points governing the contest were agreed upon, Mr. Dan Shafer representing 'Wizard' Stone, eventually signing the necessary contract with aviator Hart, on behalf of the Hart's Aviation Company ... The agreement provides that a referee shall be appointed by both contestants, but, failing an agreement in this respect, Mr. Philip Lytton has been asked to name the official."

"While a flying competition will be new to Mr. Hart, his opponent will have the advantage of previous contests ..." in France and the USA.

In parallel with the build-up of the excitement of the air race itself, C.C. Spencer's full length feature film. '**The Camera in the Clouds**' was due to be released at the Lyceum Theatre on the day of the race, 15 June 1912.

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#### SPENCER'S FILM FACTORY.

In the course of a week or two a film factory will be opened by Spencer's Pictures, Ltd. The building is on a site covering several acres near Rushcutters Bay. When he decided to enter into the manufacturing field Mr. C. Spencer, the firm's managing director, set out on a tour of the world in search of the latest contrivances for moving-picture production. The factory has been modelled on some of the biggest works in other parts of the world. On the ground floor are situated the property department, dressing rooms, wardrobe room, and offices. The developing, printing, drying, and joining rooms, and the projecting theatre, comprise the second storey. The top floor is almost entirely taken up with the studio. The paint frame extends down the whole of one side of the factory, while in the basement are the store-rooms and electric generating plant. We are informed that Spencers have engaged a permanent stock company for their photo. plays.

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*Sunday Times - 7 July 1912*





*Lyceum Theatre Pitt St Sydney - (NSW State Library)*

Taking a step back from the emotion and physical activity of actually preparing for the air race itself, what was happening to Bill's aviation business at Ham Common? Preparations for the air race at Ascot Racecourse would have involved a relocation of much, if not all, of his technical equipment from Ham Common to Ascot, including the Boxkite.

When the starting point of the race was changed to Surrey Park and set down for 29 June, another move of facilities, etc. would have been necessary. In turn, this would have further disrupted whatever training plans he may have had in place for his pupils as well as the developmental work, in conjunction with Esk Sandford on his new monoplane and any other projects which he may have been progressing at Ham.

So, with little to no media reports on the other activities during the month of June, the air race comes to the fore and provides plenty of public interest.

What was 'Wizard' Stone doing during the lead up to 15 June? He continued his theatrical/barnstorming tour. In New South Wales, he visited Bathurst with Metz-Bleriot Monoplane and his 'Globe of Death' act, which was followed by appearances at Orange and Dubbo. By the end of May, he was at Rockhampton where he is reported to have made the first powered flight in Queensland.

On 4 June, he made a second flight, this time racing a car over 15 miles. On the fifth circuit of the race, and a lap ahead of the car, he turned away to a nearby cricket ground and crashed, but his aircraft was prepared and ready to race Bill on 15 June.

The official programme for the race contained 32 pages measuring 208 cms by 140 cms. Its front page reads: "Under patronage of His Excellency the Governor-General and the Minister of Defence for Australia ... First International Aviation Contest ... (controlled under personal direction of Philip Lytton) ... W.E. Hart (Australia) v. 'Wizard' Stone

(America) ... Sydney to Parramatta & Return ... Saturday, June 15, 1912 ... Price, 6d.”  
Around the border of the page, a sponsor's name in large letters was printed repeatedly.

On 14 June 1912, The Sydney Morning Herald published an advertisement two columns wide and six inches deep with full details of this special occasion. It was most comprehensive, including charges for general admission at 2/- and grandstand enclosures at 2/- extra, as well as a special price for the Rosehill Racecourse grandstands at 2/- only. Special tram services were arranged from Circular Quay and Central Railway to Ascot Racecourse.

The programme itself was full of information about the race and its contestants, paid advertising, details of carnival officials and the “Conditions Covering This Unique Contest,” which were: “Four posts to be erected, not less than 30 feet high, and placed at equal distances. The aviators, after passing the Judge's Stand, shall circle outside posts not less round the circle at Ascot and Parramatta not less than one mile in circumference than three times before leaving the course and starting on the cross-country to Parramatta. On arriving at Parramatta, each aviator is compelled to land in closure, and remain on ground, with motor not working, not less than ten minutes. On the return journey, the same conditions shall apply as in starting. The aviator making the fastest time to be adjudged the winner. Should both aviators meet mishaps which prevent them continuing the contest, the man who has covered the greatest distance shall be declared the winner.”

The race was publicised as ‘THE SENSATION OF THE CENTURY’, ‘AUSTRALI'S FIRST AERIAL RACE’, and ‘FIRST INTERNATIONAL AVIATION CONTEST’. This last statement could have two meanings – one, that the contest is the Australia's First International etc., or two, that the contest is the first international contest held in the world, which it was not.

“The Aero Club of Great Britain Rules to govern the Contest.”

Incidentally, Stone was named ‘Eugene’ in the official programme (sic), which also included the following article: **AN APPRECIATION**

“W.E. Hart, by qualifying as the first Australian Aviator, not only distinguished himself personally, but also actually removed a reproach upon the nation. There are no lines of Lindsay Gordon's more hackneyed than those which run -

**No game was ever yet worth a rap**

**For a rational man to play,**

**Into which no accident, no mishap,**

**Could possibly find its way.**

Australia, as is well known, possesses the finest athletes in the world, men and lads who play all the games for all they are worth. It rather looked as if we were side-stepping aviation on account of that very element which Gordon declared to be necessary to make sport appetising to us. It is in this connection Mr. Hart has to be thanked as well as congratulated.”.

I trust the above has given you, the reader, an appreciation of what was one of the biggest attractions to be available up to that time for the people of Sydney and remember this was only eight years and six months after the Wright Brothers made their first powered flight ... and there was still race day to come! The only other major consideration which could upset a wonderful plan was the weather on the day ... and it did! It was not possible to start the race owing to adverse weather conditions aloft!

**The SUN - p5 - Sunday, 9 June 1912**

**AN EPOCH IN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY.**

# **The First Aviation Contest of the World.**



UNDER PATRONAGE, HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF COMMONWEALTH AND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE.

**W. E. HART v. "WIZARD" STONE**  
(AUSTRALIA). (AMERICA).

IN THE MOST NOVEL AND AWE-INSPIRING COMPETITION EVER OFFERED TO AUSTRALIANS.

**15 Miles      Round Ascot Course.      15 Miles.**

**Thence to Rosehill Racecourse.**

CIRCLING THE TRACK FOR 15 MILES, THEN LANDING AT ROSEHILL, AND RETURN TO ASCOT.

 **SATURDAY, JUNE 15th, at 3.30.** 

SEE THE GRACEFUL GYRATIONS OF THE LATEST TYPES OF BEAUTIFUL, BIRD-LIKE AIRSHIPS, CONSTITUTING THE SIGHT OF A LIFETIME.

ADDED TO WHICH WILL BE DEMONSTRATIONS BY MR. ALBIN ROBERTS, THE YOUNG AUSTRALIAN INVENTOR OF WIRELESS TELEGRAPHY.

GIVING A MINUTE AND DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE RACE.

EXHIBITION AND FLYING OF 20 MODELS OF AUSTRALIAN AEROPLANES FOR A SPECIAL PRIZE OF £25.

SELECT PROGRAMME OF MUSIC BY SYDNEY'S POPULAR BAND.

SPECIAL TRAMS FROM CIRCULAR QUAY AND CENTRAL STATION.

**2/-      POPULAR PRICES      2/-**

MOTOR AND VEHICULAR TRAFFIC FREE.      SPECIAL SPACE RESERVED.

OFFICES OF ADMINISTRATION AND CONTROL,      PHILIP LYTTON, LTD.

PHONE, CITY 1547.      EQUITABLE BUILDINGS, GEORGE-ST.

## **AIR RACE DAY - 15 JUNE 1912**

To draw a comparison between the atmosphere in Sydney which the expectation of the air race created that Saturday, and, without the added benefit of radio or television advertising, with an event today, I would suggest the atmosphere created during the annual Melbourne Cup carnival would be a comparable event! ... or even the annual AFL Grand Final!

At the time of the air race, Sydney's population was some 700,000 people and two daily newspapers estimated the attendance at Ascot racecourse at 60,000 and between 40,000 and 50,000 respectively. One newspaper reported: "The attendance within the gates was

estimated at 20,000, and on **Scotchman's Heights** above the course, there was a larger crowd. Since they could see the flying, why should they pay?"

(May I say here and now that it is a pure fallacy put about by the English to cover the money tightness of the folk from Scotland. Though some say that the folk north of Yorkshire could peel an orange in their pocket to avoid sharing it. - Ed)

Whilst the two aeroplanes were flying to and returning from Rosehill Racecourse, the interest of the crowd was to be "... maintained by the most novel feature ever introduced to a public gathering – namely, a description of the aviators' flight to Parramatta by means of wireless telegraphy which will supply to the gathering a detailed description of the race.". Also, huge working clocks will set out the exact time-making of each aviator, both to and from Rosehill Racecourse."

During the afternoon, the crowd was well entertained, but come starting time for the race at 3.30 p.m., a delay was announced due to unfavourable flying conditions. The weather was suitable for any sport in the world, except flying.

The race was abandoned at 5 p.m. to the great disappointment of the crowd, both paying and non-paying. The newspaper, 'The Sydney Morning Herald', reported: "It's blowing too hard up there," said Hart, "... to the wind was so choppy and gusty that to attempt to fly across country would be sheer madness." The report continued: "Although there was no race, the crowd thought that flying to Rosehill would be suicidal.". Wizard Stone said he saw probably more of the flying than they would have done had the airmen flown to Parramatta and back.". (Meaning Stone flew longer around the Ascot grounds than he would have done if he flew in the actual race – Ed)

Of course, the crowd of some 6,000 at Rosehill Racecourse, waiting expectantly for the aircraft to arrive, were equally disappointed when informed the race had been cancelled.

However, the audience attending the matinee session at the Lyceum Theatre in the city on the day was not disappointed, It was "... amazed at the realism of the unique flying film, 'The Camera in the Clouds', showing how it feels to fly with Airman Hart (Australia's Pioneer Aviator).".

On Monday 17 June, The Sydney Morning Herald published an article (one column, 20 inches long) covering the meeting at ascot Racecourse on the previous Saturday. I believe it is worthy of being repeated here, and follows:

## **IN THE AIR**

### **DISAPPOINTMENTS AND DOUBTS**

### **THE TREK, THE FIASCO AND THE EXODUS**

Australia's first aerial race is still an event of the future.

The much-anticipated contest should have taken place on Saturday, and thousands of citizens went to Ascot Racecourse to witness the spectacle. But they were doomed to disappointment.

**“impossible owing to the adverse conditions aloft”**

The epochal event was impossible owing to the adverse conditions aloft. But the concourse did get something for their money. They witnessed several entertaining exhibition flights, some exciting motor racing and a theoretical ‘conquest of the air’ by a score of miniature model aeroplanes. Not so the Rosehill congregation. They were like unto the people in the song who waited for the ship that never returned.

**TOLL OF THE AIR**

When it was seen that the race to Parramatta would not be attempted, the crowd rushed the arena, and, in spite of the strenuous exertions of the mounted and foot police, spread over the special zone reserved for the airmen to take off and alight. Even while Hart was in the air, they refused to leave the ground, and the young airman alighted with difficulty. This thoughtlessness of the people only tends to make aviation displays still more dangerous. During the last three years nearly 150 “air conquerors” have been killed, martyrs to the new cult. Last year was a black one for airmen, despite the progress of flight, for no less than 95 airmen were killed and 200 more or less severely injured.

**THE GREAT TREK**

The people flocked by the thousand to Ascot on Saturday. Special trams put on to convey the multitude could only accommodate a percentage of those anxious to see the flying men. Shortly after noon the great trek began. Trams from the city were rushed by hundreds, who filled the seats, and overflowed on to the platforms and footboards. Every inch of foothold was eagerly occupied. Cabs, buses, motors, taxis, and lorries added their quota, and then thousands walked. Through Redfern to Mascot streamed a never-ending procession along the dusty road. But when they reached the racecourse, several thousand deliberately waited outside, making themselves comfortable on the adjacent hills. If they could see the flying for nothing, why should they pay?

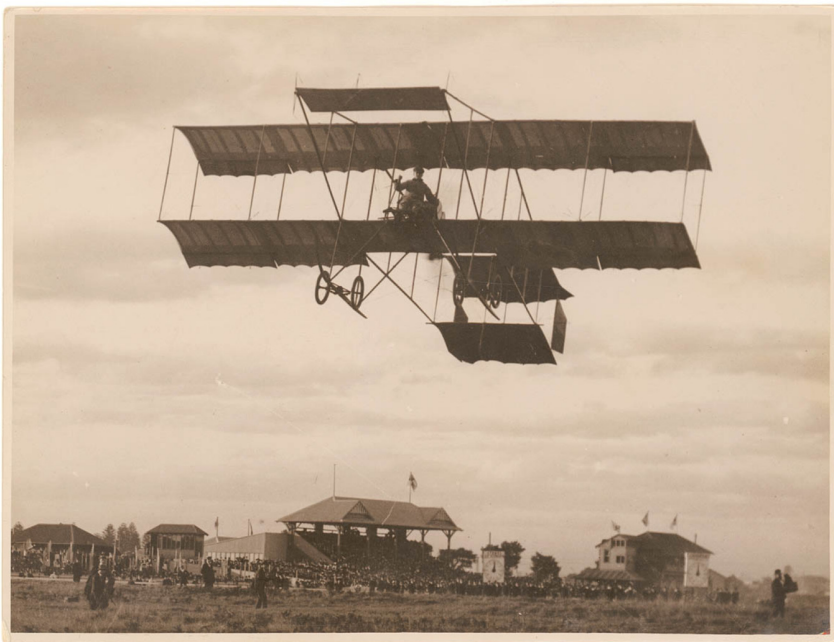
**“streaked round the course at anything between 40 and 60 miles an hour”**

Aviation carnivals are so often fiascos on account of unsatisfactory weather conditions that side shows are essential. So, the management provided some other entertainment. Motor cyclists raced round amid desultory cheering. A gilded racing automobile, with Sam M'vea at the wheel, streaked round the course at anything between 40 and 60 miles an hour.

But the most interesting of the “side shows” was the exhibition of models of Australian aeroplanes. Over 20 budding investors, two of them from Victoria, proud of their mechanical contrivances, displayed them to admiring novices. The motive power in most cases consisted of twisted elastic, which sent the propellers revolving for a limited number of seconds. Some of the little models obeyed the law of gravitation as readily as a stone. Others flew for several yards before coming to earth, while the prize model of Mrs Oliver, of Neutral Bay, flew for about 200 yards in fine style, amid loud applause, and landed amongst the crowd on the flat.

## AIRMEN IN ACTION

Hart, the Australian, clean-shaven and dapper wearing a bowling hat and long-tailed coat, walked hither and thither, interviewing officials and judges. Wizard Stone, covered in oil and old clothes, nursed his machine. The crowd grew and grew, until about 15,000 people surrounded the arena, and many thousands more blackened the hills outside the course. The day was perfect for any sport in the world save flying. For the wind blew trickily, and the airmen cast many anxious glances aloft as though they could gauge the conditions higher up. The conditions of the race were explained to the competitors by the referee, Captain G A Taylor, and the timekeepers were Major Rosenthal, Major Heritage and Captain Edwards. Then nothing was done for an hour, and the crowd grew impatient. At last an announcement was made per megaphone that Hart would take to the air on his biplane with a view of testing the air condition aloft. This was greeted with cheers and the ungainly aeroplane was brought out of its tent.



*Aviator Billy Hart 15 - June 1912 - Hood Collection - (NSW State Library)*

**“the biplane gradually rose higher and they waved their hats as it circled round the arena”**

For a time, the engine refused to do its duty but at least it got going, the assistants hung on, the aviator raised his hand, and the machine shot forward. It streaked over the ground for 30 yards and then, like a great bird took the air at five minutes to 4. The crowd cheered as the biplane gradually rose higher and they waved their hats as it circled round the arena. But the wind was obviously troublesome, and the machine rocked as the air currents affected it. When halfway round a gust from the south seemed to jam down on the plane and the airman decided in effect a landing, which he did safely enough in a hollow outside the course, though he damaged the machine slightly.

At this point, **‘The Daily Telegraph’ newspaper, dated 17 June**, reported on the landing incident as follows: Mr. Philip Lytton, the promoter of the contest, expressed keen regret that the race had not eventuated. Asked why Stone had not made the flight

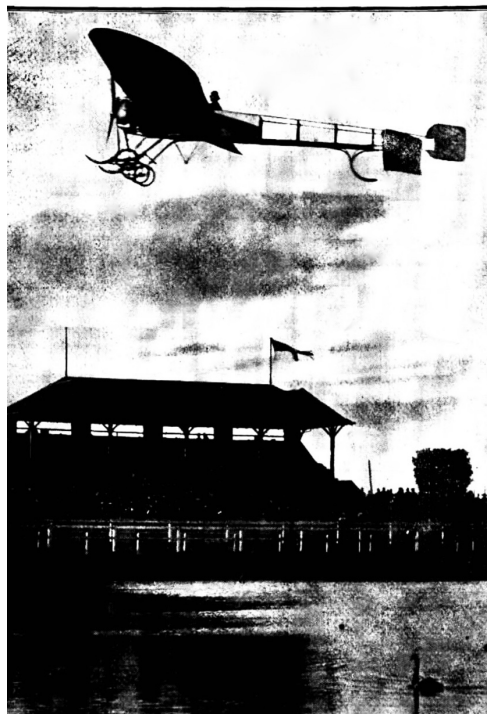


to Parramatta, Mr. Lytton said the American, in a sportsmanlike spirit, had refused to take advantage of Hart's temporary disablement, and after his second flight, said the wind was so bad that he would not attempt the Parramatta trip for £1000. In conversation subsequently Stone admitted that he thought he could have managed it when he first went up. 'But the public would have mobbed me when I came back,' he said. 'They would have said it was a put-up job, and what sort of a time would I have had? Then when I went up the second time, and felt the conditions, I would not have attempted it for all of Australia. Anyhow, the public has seen what has never before seen in Australia, two types of aeroplane in the air on the same course, and I think they ought to be satisfied. Still, I would like to keep faith with them, and will fly the race if it can be arranged, say, next Saturday.'

### **THE WIZARD OF THE AIR**

Meantime interest centred upon Wizard Stone, who with his monoplane now came in front of the grandstand. He wasted no time with preliminaries, but seating himself, set the engines going, and at three minutes past 4 another great shout heralded the fact that the Wizard was on the wing. With a buzzing that could be heard all over the course, the little machine sprang from the earth, and, like a huge dragonfly - all tail and wings - circled the pylons round the arena. It seemed far steadier than the biplane, and the crowd - many of whom had never seen a flight before - were delighted. With his machine under perfect control. Stone landed easily and gracefully, and again the crowd cheered lustily.

#### **FLYING AT ASCOT.**



*Wizard Stone the American on his monoplane circling the Ascot Racecourse  
(SMH -17 June 1912 - p5)*

**“conditions aloft were so bad that it would be suicidal to attempt the race”**

It was just at this stage that the crowd rushed the arena to get a closer view of the aeroplanes and their intrepid navigators. They were scattered all over the course when Hart, having affected repairs, took the air again and made the finest flight of the day. Careering right over the course, he made in the direction of Botany Bay, went four miles across country, and executing a graceful turn towards the Pacific, swung in again, and in suite of the handicap of the crowd landed safe and sound on terra firma. It was the best flight of the day and the young Australian received an ovation. Both men stated that the conditions aloft were so bad that it would be suicidal to attempt the race. But, in order that the crowd would not be disappointed they each risked another ascent. Stone made another fine flight, and again landed safely. Shortly after 5 o'clock, Hart made his third ascent and remaining aloft several minutes, again swooped to earth in safety. So, although there was no race, the crowd saw probably more of the flying than they would have done had the airmen flown to Parramatta and back.

## **THE EXODUS**

But, after the crowd rushed the ground after the second flight, many of the spectators began to move homeward. By the time Hart was doing the fifth flight of the day more than half the people had left the course. The band played “God Save the King,” and the great exodus began. Every cab, taxi, omnibus and tram car were soon packed, and thousands returned as they had come, on foot. A block in the trams made hundreds more walk home. Altogether the day was not quite a success.

**“Every cab, taxi, omnibus and tram car were soon packed.”**

“It’s blowing too hard up there,” said Hart when he alighted, “to think of flying to Rosehill. It would be suicidal.”

Wizard Stone said that the wind was so choppy and gusty that to attempt to fly across country would be sheer madness.

## **AT PARRAMATTA**

It was a disappointed crowd that left the Rosehill Racecourse shortly after 5 o'clock, at which late hour it was announced that the atmospheric conditions at Ascot were such as to preclude all possibility of the contest taking place. Possibly there were about 2000 people within the enclosure, and about twice that number occupying points of vantage outside.

“there were a couple of suspicious - looking wires dangling from a point on the grandstand”

Visitors were led to understand that “wireless” had been installed, and that they would be apprised of all that was going on at Ascot. Certainly, there were a couple of suspicious- looking wires dangling from a point on the grandstand, but it was also a certainty that they were useless so far as messages from Ascot were concerned. No

provision had even been made for telegraphic communication, and what news that did filter through came through the much-abused telephone. The crowd commenced to gather at Rosehill at about 2 o'clock, and they patiently waited till past 5 o'clock.

### **STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR**

Mr Philip Lytton, under whose direction the contest was organised, states that both he and the aviators regret that on Saturday the winds were too bad to permit of the projected trip to Parramatta being undertaken. He adds that he is arranging with Mr Stone and Mr Hart to hold the postponed race at an early date, the proceeds to be given to charity.



*Aviator W. E. Hart at Air Race  
(Australian Town & Country - p33 - 19 June 1912)*

A few days later, the Aerial League held a meeting (minutes of the meeting show an incorrect date - as June 1st, 1912), the minutes of which read (in part): "Mr. Hart was present and was questioned regarding the non-competition in the aerial Race, Sydney to Parramatta, and his contest with Mr. Stone. Mr. Hart's explanation was considered satisfactory and arrangements were completed for the Aerial Race for the following Saturday, the League offering a Gold Medal to be competed for."

The "... following Saturday ..." was 29 June 1912, the new date for the race. That was exactly 14 days after the first attempted Air Race.

Because Ascot Racecourse was scheduled to hold a race meeting on 29 June 1912, The Aerial League of Australia arranged for the race to commence from Surrey Park, a large area of cleared land located at the north-west corner of Botany Road and Gardiners Road, then North Botany, now Mascot.

Surrey Park has also been described as 'Surrey Football Ground near Botany', 'Surrey Grounds, Botany', 'the Surrey Farm', and later, 'Shepherd's Bush.' The location of Surrey Park may have been well-known in 1912, but it does not exist today.

It had been used as a circus ground, football ground, greyhound racing (1927 -1933) with monkeys dressed in jockey clothes on the backs of dogs, but it was cleared ground in 1912 suitable for the starting point of our first air race and its location was well-known to the public as the newspaper shown below suggests:

## **HART-STONE FLIGHT.**

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**Arrangements have been completed for the postponed cross-country aerial flight between "Wizard" Stone and W. E. Hart, and this afternoon, weather permitting, the contest will take place.**

**The airmen will leave Surrey Park, Botany-road, at 2 o'clock, and will fly to Parramatta Park. The fixture will be conducted under the auspices of the Aerial League of Australia.**

*Daily Telegraph - p14 - 29 June 1912*

As a matter of interest, in the late 1930s, an approach was made to the local council by the Victorian Football Association to buy the entire Shepherd's Bush property and construct a large stadium planned to become the headquarters in Sydney of the southern game – now the AFL. These negotiations actually proceeded favourably until brought to an end by the outbreak of World War II in 1939. Then the matter collapsed. Today, it is a commercial/light industry site. For many years, the firm of Bradford Kendall Ltd. Was based there.

At least five newspapers reported on the air race, and I have reports from two country newspapers, including 'The Wyalong advocate'. Even an English aviation magazine, gave a brief report of the race under the heading, 'An Australian Race'.

## **An Australian Race.**

THE postponed race between W. E. Hart, the Australian aviator, on a Bristol biplane, and A. B. Stone, on an American-built copy of a Blériot, was held on June 29th. The course was from the Surry football ground at Sydney to Parramatta, a distance of 14½ miles, and the arrangement was that the two were to start with an interval of 10 mins. between them. Hart won the toss, and got away first in fine style. He covered the course in 23 mins. 53 secs., and landed in the Parramatta Park. Stone lost his way, and mistaking the St. George's river for the Parramatta, landed at Belmore, after being in the air for half an hour.

*An Australian Race - 10 Aug 1912 - Flight Magazine - p735*

'The Evening News', published 29 June 1912, gave a very comprehensive report of this celebrated event in our aviation history, and, because of this, the complete article is below. As I have mentioned previously, news reports covering aviation often appeared in the sporting section of particular newspapers and that is where this report was featured:

## **THE FLYING RACE**

Sydney to Parramatta

A Splendid Start

Accident to Stone

Hart's Successful Journey

"In favourable weather, and in the presence of several thousand spectators, the Australian aviator, Hart, and 'Wizard' Stone, the American birdman, entered upon their much-discussed aerial race, from Botany to Parramatta, this afternoon.

Hart's machine flew over the starting line at 3.26 p.m., and, heading straight for Parramatta, disappeared at a good pace,

'Wizard' Stone soared aloft 5 minutes later. His flight was truer than that of Hart, and his pace seemed to be greater.

Billed to start at 2 o'clock, the contest, from that interminable delay, which now appears to be inseparable with exhibitions of aviation in Australia, it was 90 minutes later before the intrepid airmen were ready to start.

Several hundred spectators assembled on the Surrey Farm at the appointed time, and from then onwards tramcars to other vehicles contributed their quota to the expectant crowd, which when the flight commenced had swelled to about 4000. Interest was evenly divided between the two diverse types of flying machines.

The monoplane of Wizard Stone was housed under a tent, but the more cumbersome-looking biplane of Hart's stood out in the open.

There was the usual preliminary adjustment of the machine, in which the crowd took an eager interest.

When all was ready, Stone suddenly discovered that he had left his goggles at Ascot and a messenger was sent post-haste for them.

Looking very neat and trim, Stone's monoplane was wheeled out into the open, and its symmetrical, graceful lines evoked much admiration.

As a sequel to the ascot demonstration, the biplane of Hart presented a weather-worn appearance, the tail being patched in several places, while seven ribs, which had been damaged, were temporarily repaired with wire. Both airmen wore a confident smile as they mounted their machines for the contest, Stone bidding a merry good-bye to his wife and little daughter.

'My machine is in first-class order,' said Stone from his seat to an 'Evening News' reporter, 'and the weather appears to be very favourable. **Only one thing troubles me, and that is that I have no idea where Parramatta, the finishing post is.** However, I think I'll get there all right (sic)'.

Hart was equally confident. 'The machine is all right, although it is a bit patched. **Yes, I have a course mapped out, and I am confident that I will win.**'

There was a hum of excitement as the engines were set going **for the benefit of a motion-picture operator**. Then Hart, who was flying first, signalled to his attendants, 'All right'. There was a whizzing of the propeller, a shout of 'Stand Clear!' and the machine started on its journey. Running along the ground for about 150 yards, the biplane gradually lifted, rising to a height of about 250 ft, and then headed for Parramatta amid loud cheers, crossing the starting line at 3.26 p.m.

Just after crossing the line, the machine encountered several sharp gusts, and oscillated considerably, causing some trepidation among the interested watchers, but the unsteadiness was only momentary, and the airman headed for Parramatta at a good pace. Increasing his elevation, he was soon lost to view in the thick smoke which mingled with the lowering cloudbanks accumulating in the distance.

By pre-arrangement, Stone commenced his flight five minutes later. By comparison with Hart's start, his ascent was graceful and striking. Like a great bird he soared into the air, rising almost instantly to about double the elevation of his opponent. In the air also, the difference between the behaviour of the two machines was most marked. As steady as a rock, the monoplane answered to the will of the pilot with unswerving accuracy. Stone at first headed in the wrong direction, but quickly realising his error, he swooped on to the right course.

The air currents did not seem to trouble him as they seemed to trouble his opponent, and his pace was certainly much greater, leaving among the spectators a general impression that the American must prove victorious.

The race will be decided on the respective times that each man registers, or, if a descent is necessary, on the distance traversed.



## AT PARRAMATTA

Hart found the wind very choppy. Immediately after rising he went to a greater height and made good headway until he reached Rookwood, when he encountered a gale. By means of tacking he was able to reach Parramatta Park, where he landed at 3.54 p.m. After landing, he gave another aerial exhibition. Later on, he stated that he did not think that stone would complete the journey owing to the dirty weather up aloft.

A big crowd watched his arrival from his arrival from the park and surrounding hills. Hart left his machine in Parramatta Park and returned home with his father by rail.

## ACCIDENT TO STONE - LANDS AT BELMORE

For over half-an-hour after Hart landed at Parramatta the crowd anxiously waited for Stone to come into view. Up till 5 o'clock, however, he did not put in an appearance, and the message was received on the ground that the 'Wizard' had met with an accident, and he had fallen near Belmore.

There was considerable excitement, and rumour was rife as to what had befallen the intrepid airman.

## STONE FORCED TO DESCEND - PETROL GIVES OUT

As a matter of fact, Stone's supply of petrol is stated to have given out, forcing him to descend. He discovered the deficiency as he was soaring over Belmore.

Stone's misgivings, as to the course he was to follow was realised, for when he descended, he was a considerable distance out. An 'Evening News' reporter went to convey the matter to the Canterbury police, and two officers and a reporter went to seek the missing airman. They had found that he had descended in Wylie's lane, a mile and a half from the township of Belmore and towards Bankstown.

He had considerable difficulty, owing to the trees in the vicinity, to affect a landing, but here his great experience stood him in good stead. By clever manoeuvring, he steered his machine into the narrow roadway, with practically no damage.

At 5 o'clock Stone was still guarding his machine, surrounded by an eager crowd, who had hurried to the scene. He was waiting for a motor car, which he intended to resume his journey and complete the course.

To ascend again, however, he anticipates considerable trouble, owing to the little space afforded him to make a preliminary run.

'Follow the tram track', a humourist advised Stone, as he stood guard over his machine, but the worried and disappointed aviator only smiled.

## VICTORY FOR HART

Captain George Taylor, secretary of the Australian Aerial League (sic) and referee and starter from Botany of today's race, when seen stated that Hart had been awarded the race, as he had complied with all the conditions agreed upon. And had completed the distance ... **14 ½ miles ... in 23 minutes 52 secs.**

Hart after reaching Parramatta was informed of Stone's accident, thereupon again ascended, and made a search for his missing opponent, but without success."  
(End of Evening News Report)

## **No Sunday Performance.**

A great many people inspected the wonderful aeroplane in the Park on Sunday, a rumour having been circulated that Mr. Hart might give an exhibition flight on that day. But Mr. Hart, like a wise man, does not believe in working on the day of rest. He disclaims any pretensions as to being what is popularly termed a "wow-ser," but he refuses to fly on Sundays on any conditions or for any inducements. Besides having a sensible appreciation of his own need of rest, he says, he is not desirous of offending the many who dislike the indulgence in any form of sport on the Sabbath. Everyone is glad to hear such an expression of opinion from a young man who is the pioneer of aviation in Australia, and the idol and oracle, for the time being, of a vast proportion of the population.

*The Cumberland Argus - 3 July 1912 - p2*

'The Sydney Morning Herald', dated 1 July 1912, gave a more complete description of Hart's landing at Parramatta Park:

"Captain Stowe, of the Aerial League; was timekeeper at the Parramatta end, and, strangely, he was the first to catch a glimpse of the biplane. It was then several miles away, to the south of Rookwood. Then, when it approached north-westerly towards Rookwood, it was seen that Hart was making heavy weather. The machine rocked a good deal. From that point, it worked more to the north, and then, as it crossed the river, it seemed to get into a calmer atmosphere, and came along at a great pace (Hart said he must have been travelling at 70 miles per hour – wind assisted!). Skirting the northern bank of the river, Hart worked to the north-west boundary of the park, and then making a half-circle, he swooped down, and made a very graceful descent."

The above newspaper reports of the race included mention of "... a motion-picture operator.' ... at Surrey Park and of the 'Sydney Morning Herald' report of "... a cinematograph machine which was taking pictures at Parramatta Park. To date, I have not been able to verify the existence of these two records of the race!

A postscript to the above newspaper reports of the air race was published by 'The Alert', a local newspaper for the Lakemba district in Sydney, on 18 February 1932.

It is an extract from an article written by the Editor of the newspaper and tells of the incident he experienced in 1912 whilst walking with his son when A.B. Stone made his forced landing at the same time in what is now known as the suburb of 'Wiley Park'.

The article was headed 'Old Lakemba Recalled – Sidelights on Early Days (by the Editor)' and the extract reads as follows:

### **Early Airman in Lakemba**

It was upon clear land near where the big public school is now built, facing Wylie's Ave, that the famous American airman, 'Wizard' Stone, was forced down one Saturday afternoon in the winter of 1911 (sic – should be 1912) during his sensational race with Hart, the Parramatta dentist. The course was from Mascot to Parramatta and back. Hart, one of our earliest fliers had a terribly old contraption or 'bus', while his opponent flew a light powerful up-to-date monoplane.

### **Lost in Clouds**

Hart flew low- he just appeared to scrape over the top of Hurlstone Park (railway) station on his way, while Stone, rising to 5000 feet at the start, lost his direction in heavy cloud and found himself down towards Como. By the time Hart was on his return trip (sic – incorrect, Hart did not make a return trip), Stone had worked his way back to Punchbowl, and flying low in cycles over the railway bridge, decided to land, as stated, on the cleared paddock behind where Lakemba school is now built.

There was no one near Stone when he came down and he made a perfect landing, only injuring the undercarriage slightly when bumping over some rough ground. I was at the time with my son nearby, and we were with the flyer within a minute or two of his landing. Speaking with a strong Yankee drawl, he asked where he was exactly, and had we seen Hart? His goggles were smothered with an oil film. "No. I'm not hurt," he said, "but I'm god dam mad at getting corralled in the clouds and losing sight of Hart".

By this time quite a crowd had gathered round, running in all directions. Stone said he was booked to leave Sydney by steamer on Monday morning for Brisbane and asked if transport to wharf by road could be arranged. "I can strip the wires," he said. "Quite easily if I can get a little help and a few tools."

I arranged with Mr. George Potter of Canterbury by phone from the St. George Hotel, where our American visitor learned how spontaneous Australians can be in their appreciation of men of courage and resource.

### **Belmore's Demonstrative Welcome**

Stone's visit was none the less welcome because it was unexpected and somewhat forced. Belmore and Lakemba recognised him as a good sport, and besides 21 years ago close personal contact with airmen was quite an uncommon experience; so, while a guard kept watch outside the hotel over Stone's machine, the crowd inside had become bigger and more demonstrative as the drinks went round in their admiration of the visitor.



*St George Hotel - Belmore c.1924 – (NLA)*

Mr. George Potter later garaged the whole outfit in his big stables over the weekend at the rear of the town hall, and I found afterwards that Mr. Potter delivered it to the steamer also at Darling Harbour and refused to accept any payment whatever because poor Stone was at the time up against it.”. (End of extract).

Although Stone did not win the air race, it seems he may have enjoyed his “end of race” revelry more than his race opponent, who, “... left his machine at Parramatta and returned home with his father by rail.”.

Another observation about the air race and Stone: whilst Hart would have had some knowledge of the area between Surrey Park and Parramatta Park, Stone did not. As reported above in the article about the race published in ‘The Evening News’, Stone is quoted as saying: “only one thing troubles me, and that is I have no idea where Parramatta Park, the finish post, is. However, I think I will get there all right.” What an admission! It is hardly a compliment to his race opponent. How seriously did he really approach the air race?

As an experienced pilot of his time, “flying the course” before the event would seem to have been a reasonable precaution for him to take! But then, he has been described as “... wisecracking, barnstorming ‘Wizard’ Stone ...”, photographed in the cockpit of an aeroplane with a cigar in his mouth, so maybe his approach was not based on taking a reasonable precaution!? It seems that the two competitors in our first air race never met again after the start of their race from Surrey Park.

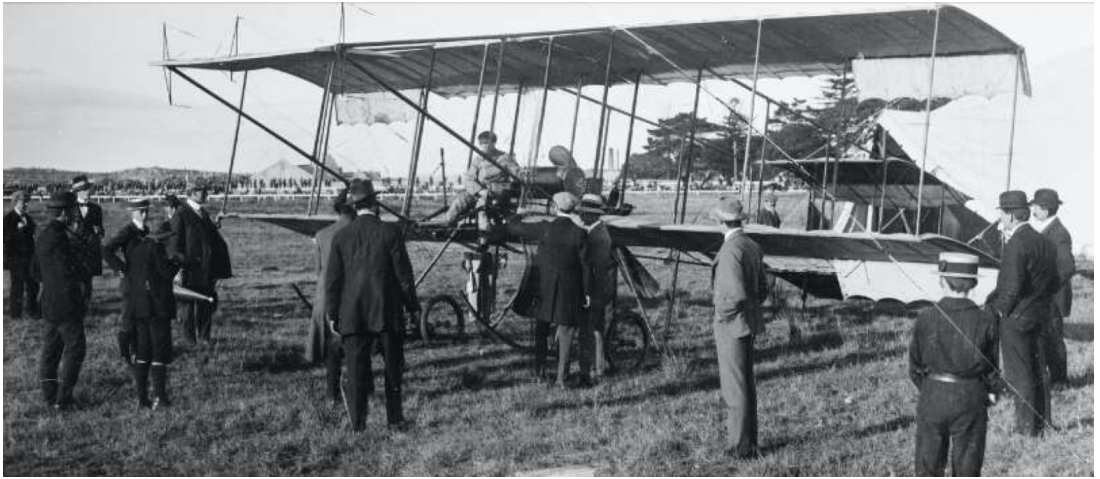
(Hart Family sources say that Aviator Billy Hart followed the railway tracks to Parramatta. This seems quite probable as to holding a map in that wind machine would be just ludicrous. You don't reveal your game plan to an opponent. After all, the 'Wizard' had another two weeks to get prepared. To my way of thinking, it was a classic Tortoise and the Hare race! – Ed)



At this time of early aviation, it was just regarded as a sport. Nothing more serious than that. The thoughts of aircraft to be used for warfare was not high on the public's mind. Talk of "a first Big War" looming had been circulated. Therefore, with this thought or notion, the illustrious Sydney Magazine, The Bulletin – Vol 33 No. 1687 - 13 June 1912, wrote a short article about the upcoming air race.

"Saturday next will be a great occasion in Sydney if there is any real patriotism in the importing city. On that day the Ma capital (sic) should thrill with pride when an Australian and a Yankee put up the most thrilling race yet seen in this continent. 'Wizard' Stone, the American, will meet 'Bronzewing' Hart the Australian, in a 15-mile aerial race on monoplanes (sic). (They didn't know the difference of types of planes – Ed). The start will be made at Ascot (Sydney) racecourse, after circling which the aviators will streak away to Rosehill course, near Parramatta, circle that course five times, and finally streak back to Ascot. This will be Australia's first race between aviators, although Hart has repeatedly raced trains, motor cars, cows, etc., and he has also raced in the law courts. And it is a matter for congratulation that in its first race this county will be represented by an Australian bred and born, flying a monoplane made to his own design, and manufactured in his own workshop in Sydney in the brief space of 16 days (This was a plane that Hart was building but decided to go with the Bristol Biplane for the race -Ed). It is fitted with a 50 h.p. Gnome engine, and Hart believes it is capable of a speed of 70 miles per hour. The 'Wizard,' whom this writer believes to be identical with the man who put up the motor-cycle stunt in the Globe of Death at the J.D. William's cycle carnival, at Sydney Cricket Ground, a few months ago, is a daring aviator. His monoplane was landed in Sydney last Monday. But in Hart the plucky Yankee will meet his equal in deeds of derring-do, for Hart is a curious mixture of extreme cautious and utter reckless. Some of the things that Hart has done when testing various designs of machines are hair-raising. Provided all goes well it will be a great race, and worth going a long way to see. The event is promoted and managed by the well-known Philip Lytton, of theatrical fame."





*Hart sitting in his Boxkite. It is possible he is in front of his canvas hangar at Penrith. c. 1912 (NLA)*





## CHAPTER 17

### ANOTHER NEW AEROPLANE - JULY 1912

'The Sydney Morning Herald', dated Monday, 1 July 1912, published a very comprehensive report about the air race, describing the less than satisfactory weather on the day - "an occasional spurt of rain" - and the fact that "... this time the airmen were distinctly on their mettle; they appeared to consider that they owed a debt to the public, and were determined to pay it off at all risks."

It also mentioned that Hart had been photographed in addition to landing "within a few feet of a cinematograph machine which was taking pictures." 'The Sydney Morning Herald' does not hold any of these pictures.

Stone had been interviewed the previous night (that is the Sunday night after the race) and said he was at a great disadvantage through not knowing the course better! Hart was quoted, "It was unfortunate that Stone lost his way. A better arrangement, I think, for a future contest would be over a circular course against time, the best to win."

The lack of knowledge by journalists of the differences between the different types of aircraft was again evident in this article which described Hart's biplane as a "monoplane"!

The Herald's editorial was very long and covered the state of aviation in Europe and America and how it related to Australia. For example, its opening statement reads:

#### AVIATION IN AUSTRALIA

**"The air race of Saturday was the first affair of the kind to take place in Australia.** We have had some experience of flying, but it has been infrequent and at long intervals. Saturday's event, happily brought to issue undisturbed by aerial antagonism, is much more likely to focus public attention upon the science. It makes appeal, for one thing, to the sporting interest. And that is always a large interest. Further, the idea of a race with two pre-determined points of beginning and ending concerned, and contestants, and the racing necessity of speed, are all unfamiliar elements in Australian aviation, and are all elements calculated to give the community a concrete grip of the matter."

In the body of the editorial, mention is made of "The tragic death roll of aviation is a melancholy witness to that. It is a roll which constantly claims the lives of men who are famous in air, and men whose expert control of details of flying should in ordinary circumstances secure them against the fate of accident."

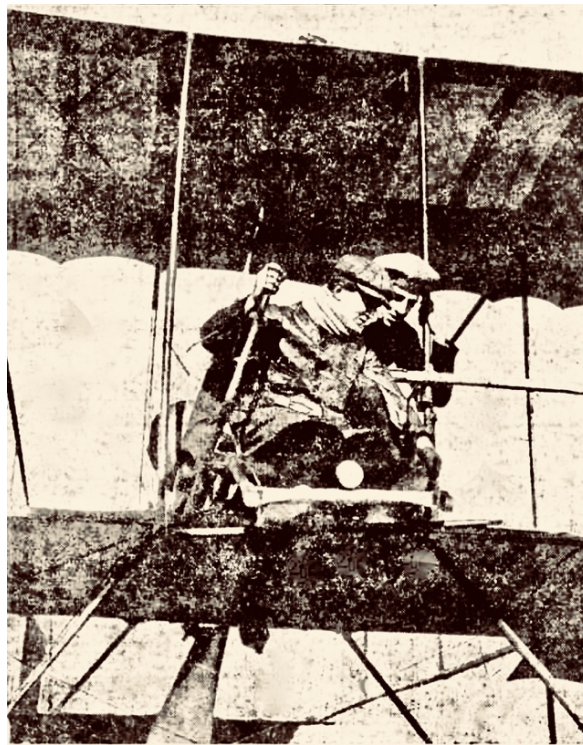
Statistics published in the magazine, 'Motor in Australia', on 2 September 1912, show in the first year of the aeroplane's appearance, there was one death. In 1909, there were 3, in 1910, 29 and in 1911, 83, a total of 115. Almost half these deaths were traceable to the aviator himself. During 1912, the magazine estimated 200 fatalities, hopefully less!

The editorial ends with: “All this progress of the phenomenal order, and Australia is as yet outside its radius. But with aviators inclined to come this way from abroad, and with a skilful exploiter of the air, who, in the person of **Mr. Hart, is himself an Australian, we may take heart**, and foretell the day as not far distant when Australian aviators will be in line with the world’s development of air control. The possibilities latent in the science are incalculable. It is enough to say that its reduction to the minimum of risk upon which thousands of investigators are at this moment setting their hopes will revolutionise human life.”.

When Bill Hart was awarded the air race by the referee, George Taylor, he achieved yet another first in Australian aviation to be added to the other firsts during his relative short career.

As we learnt earlier, Stone was scheduled to sail from Sydney to Brisbane on Monday, 1 July, and there does not seem to be any report of the two race contestants meeting before the American left Sydney, so it would seem the conclusion to our first international air race was something of a non-event.

After the race, the moving of Hart’s support activities (not forgetting Stone’s), from Ascot Racecourse, Surrey Park and Parramatta Park back to Ham Common would have been a time-consuming exercise for the winner’s team.



*Aviator W.E. Hart and Manger C.S. Clancy  
(The SUN - 6 June 1912)*

Newspapers differ in reporting when Hart flew his Boxkite from Parramatta Park to Ham Common, but the ‘Cumberland Argus’, dated July, reports it happened on Monday, 30 June. So, Hart left for Ham Common but on approach he skimmed the surface of a

nearby lagoon but landed safely in a paddock some distance from his base. (As shown before, Hart had a no fly on Sunday's policy. In fact, Hart received a pulpit commendation from Rev G.C. Percival at the Leigh Memorial Church, Parramatta. "Mr. Percival said that it was quite in line with his principles as a Christian teacher to rather commend a man for doing right than wait till he had done wrong and then condemn and blacken him. He felt sure that Mr. Hart's stand in that particular must have a good affect upon the world of sport. It was certainly a credit to Parramatta." – 3 July 'Cumberland Argus' – Ed)

'The Nepean Times' reported on 6 July that some panels of paddock fencing were removed to enable him to take off, but struck another fence and damaged his aeroplane, probably for the last time, and sprained his wrist.

'The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate' - 3 July 1912 - to give the newspaper it's full name, was so proud of their native son that they printed a banner that says it all:

## PARRAMATTA WINS "General" Hart's Flight

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### His Vindication

'The Cumberland Argus' continued in glowing terms:

"Parramatta is now proud indeed of her very own aviator, Mr. W.E. Hart, and the most indefatigable croakers with respect to his performances are silenced for ever. **For, be it remembered, it was no little thing that our Parramatta airman accomplished on Saturday.** He was backed by no millionaire syndicate nor encouraged by any hope of a monster prize like those which reward the daring spirits who seek to cleave the clouds in other lands."

Samuel Brogden wrote an article entitled 'The Flying Dentist': "Then the flying dentist's luck began to run out."!

Yes, the tide had begun to turn. With activities at his base starting to return to normal, completing the construction of his new two-seater monoplane would have been high on Bill's list of jobs to be done, as his Boxkite was nearing the end of its flying days.

As mentioned earlier, the newspaper, 'The evening News' reported that Hart's biplane "... presented a weather-worn appearance ..., the tail being patched in several places, while seven ribs, which had been damaged, were temporarily repaired with wire.". But, at surrey Park for the race start, Hart had said loyally his" ... machine is all right, although it is a bit patched." On 9 February 1938, 'The Sydney Morning Herald' quoted

him saying “He flew the plane a total of about 10,000 miles, but towards the end of its career a crash was almost a weekly occurrence.”.

Although Hart’s reputation had been greatly enhanced by being awarded the air race, it seems interest in his activities soon fell away following its finish.

Hart and Sandford continued with the construction of their new two -seater monoplane. It was to be powered by the 50 h.p. Gnome rotary engine from the Boxkite which had served Hart so well since he had commenced his flying career some 10 months previously. The Boxkite airframe was put aside for use as required.



*Mr. W.E. Hart postcard c.1912*

*Bristol Boxkite flying over Ham Common – (Photo: Keith White)*



## CHAPTER 18

### THE NEW MONOPLANE - AUGUST 1912

There does not appear to be any report mentioning Bill Hart or his activities at Ham common in the daily issues of 'The Sydney Morning Herald' during the month of August 1912. Unfortunately, copies of the local newspaper, 'The Hawkesbury Herald' for the period from July 1904 to November 1921 are not held by either the Windsor Library, the State Library of N.S.W. or the National Library of Australia, Canberra.

However, we do know that Messrs. Hart and Sandford continued construction of their new two-seater monoplane and subjected it to flight tests around the airfield at Ham Common. Reports varied about this new aeroplane. For example, it was reported incorrectly as a 'two passenger' monoplane, and that it was successfully tested at Wagga Wagga, which I believe is incorrect.



*Bill Hart, pioneer Australian aviator, on his new monoplane. – (Powerhouse Museum)*

There was an expectation of having the monoplane completed to take there, towards at the end of August, but that was not going to happen as explained in an article published in the Wagga 'The Daily Advertiser', dated Tuesday, 20 August 1912, which reads:

### EXHIBITION OF AVIATION

"Mr. W.E. Hart, the well-known aviator, who intended giving an exhibition of aviation in Wagga during show week, has had to postpone his flight until the middle of next month, owing to a mishap to his propeller. Mr. Hart, who holds the southern agency for the well-known Ford cars, will, however, be at Wagga himself on Wednesday,

demonstrating the qualities of the car, and he has an advertisement on page 3 which I found interesting.”.

**W. E. HART,**  
**GENERAL SOLE AGENT, AVIATOR, 65 MARKET-ST., SYDNEY.**  
Who holds the SOUTHERN AGENCY for the well-known

## **FORD CARS**

will be at BELLAIR'S HOTEL on WEDNESDAY. Demonstration of  
the Latest Model Full Torpedo Ford Car, 20 h.p., five seater, £240 complete.

**COME AND INVESTIGATE THIS POPULAR CAR.**

After Bill Hart sold his dental practice at West Wyalong in August 1909, he established the first Ford new car agency with his car business at 65 market, street, Sydney. As Stanley Brogden wrote in his book, “The history of Australian aviation”, Bill Hart seemed to have made more money out of buying and selling cars. Whatever, he continued to operate his motor car business in conjunction with his new aviation interest, and this, no doubt, helped to finance at least some of his aviation activities from September 1911.

Nevertheless, there has always been a question in my mind of his capacity to have an aeroplane available for his daily activities. These included the flying school, of which very little, if any has been written since it began in January, and any promotional work which he may have undertaken e.g., the air race. The three full-length moving films in which he was involved must have taken many hours of his available time.

He had his rebuilt Boxkite, and, in his letter dated 14 December 1911, to the Federal Minister for Defence, he wrote that he would “... have two machines in perfect flying order for the (flying) school ...”, but there is no information about him having additional aircraft at his disposal.

Prior to the above-mentioned letter to the Federal Minister, the publication, “The Motor in Australia”, dated 1 December 1911, wrote about him opening “... aviation schools in Melbourne and Sydney. The machine which he is to use in Melbourne in connection with the school is being built (where built – Sydney or Melbourne?) by himself and his mechanics and is now practically completed, and except for a few alterations will be exactly the same type as the machine he is present flying.”! ...and remember, this is months before the air race and the building of his two-seater monoplane.

What happened to the aircraft? ... if it existed! Research! Researched has failed to produce a photo of Bill Hart's new biplane. So how did he keep his aviation business going? ... with one boxkite which was subject to down time due to repairs after accidents, routine maintenance, etc?



Another question: what happened to his flying school? When he wrote to the Minister for Defence in December 1911, he had "... a few officers ... booked as pupils ...". Did they complete their flying course? Did they qualify as pilots? Who examined them?

The Parnell and Boughton book, 'Flypast' (published 1988), lists W.E. Hart as the only recipient who qualified in Australia for pilot's licence (No.199) from the Royal Aero Club, London, which, at the time – 1911-1912 – was one of the two issuing licences, the other being the aero Club of France. The next to receive a pilot's licence (No.1126) in Australia was J. Marduel, who qualified on 16 January 1915, at Richmond, N.S.W.

As Bill Hart's Aviator's Certificate was the only one ever issued by the Aerial League of Australia, it seems reasonable to assume no pupil completed his flying training at Ham Common.

Sadly, the absence of Bill Hart's basic records has not helped in researching all of his aviation activities.

During August 1912, he replaced the damaged propeller which had prevented him from taking his new monoplane to Wagga Wagga and continued working on testing it.



## CHAPTER 19

### THE CRASH AND HOSPITAL - SEPTEMBER - DECEMBER 1912

The emotion of winning the air race and the excitement resulting from the expectation of the successful construction of his monoplane would have Bill Hart starting the month of September in a positive frame of mind. There was the proposed visit to Wagga Wagga for the flying exhibition postponed from the previous month, together with the first anniversary of his first flight in his Boxkite on 25 September 1911.

As well, on 1 September, 'Life' magazine published a six-page article of high praise about him. Entitled 'Our Ablest Flying Man', by G.C. Percival, the last paragraph of the article reads:

"- Honours for the Aviator. – An evidence of the esteem and admiration in which his natal town holds him is seen in the fact on the occasion of its recent municipal jubilee Mr Hart was treated as a distinguished guest at the banquet forming a part of the commemoration programme (sic); when he treated the company to a speech as full of modesty of spirit as of clear mastery of his subject, which, of course, is aviation. Still more recently Mr. Hart was accorded a 'Continental' by the residents of Parramatta in the beautiful park adjacent to the town and was presented with a purse of sovereigns and an illuminated address. Should all go well – as every Australian will devoutly wish it may in more ways than one – our aviator will live to earn the yet wider appreciation of the Commonwealth, of which he is so worthy a son, and in whose complex life and movement he is a by no means insignificant worker."

Unfortunately for Bill Hart, the Commonwealth does not seem to have agreed with this sentiment. However, that has not prevented others from recognising his significant efforts in helping to establish what was then a new form of powered flight in the Australian society. This recognition has taken different forms as follows:

1. There is a monument erected in Parramatta Park commemorating his cross-country flight from Penrith to Parramatta in November 1911. Funds to cover erection costs were raised by public appeal and it was unveiled in 1963. Unfortunately, the inscription on the monument itself contains a number of errors of fact.
2. A small number of local councils in Sydney have each named a suburban street after him.
3. The Holroyd and District Historical Society operates the Linnwood Museum, 25 Byron Road, in Guilford, N.S.W., which embraces a Hall of Fame into which, on May 1987, was inducted.

WILLIAM EWART HART  
AUSTRALIA'S FIRST AVIATOR  
INTO  
THE LINNWOOD HALL OF FAME

For the Achievement of Excellence in the Western region of Sydney



***Linnwood Hall***

***In 1891 George and Susan McCredie Built and moved into their new home "Linnwood", with their nine children. George became very active in local politics, becoming Mayor in 1892 and elected to the seat of Cumberland.***

4. Two plaques were laid in Penrith. One was organised by the Nepean District Historical society Inc., The Australian Air League, Deakin Wing and the Australian Army Supply Depot and placed in a garden inside the depot. It has since been removed before the depot closed and moved to the Penrith Electric Model aero Club at Emu Plains. The other was placed on a pillar in a Penrith shopping mall. This one no longer exists.



5. A less permanent form of recognition was sponsored by the Parramatta Foundation Week Council in 1991 with four literary competitions relating to the history of Parramatta. The theme of each competition was Parramatta's part in establishing aviation in Australia, with two of them dealing specifically with William Ewart Hart's contribution to our aviation history.

6. An area of land has been leased at Emu Heights, N.S.W. by the Penrith Electric Model Aero Club for use by its members to fly their model aeroplanes. It is named 'HART FIELD' in memory of W.E. Hart.
7. On 6 December 2013, a metal boxkite sculpture was unveiled on the Thornton Hall Estate, North Penrith. It was dedicated to aviator Hart, who used the grounds of Thornton Hall as his landing field.



*Boxkite Sculpture at Thornton Hall Estate, Penrith.*

In addition to the above testimonials, there are individual enthusiasts involved in the promotion of Hart's memory. They are located in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth.

Bill Hart continued to ensure his monoplane would be ready to take to Wagga Wagga.

On 4 September 1912, he made two successful flights during the morning. His third flight of the day came later in the afternoon during which he flew north over Freeman's Reach. Returning to Ham Common at about 5.30 p.m. and flying 200 feet high, witnesses stated the aeroplane fell in a spiral to the ground and was completely wrecked. Bill Hart was very seriously injured, and after his rescuers had great difficulty extracting him from the wrecked aircraft.

Other witness reports vary concerning the accident. One newspaper report stated: "... when, not far from his hangar, his engine went wrong. He was a couple of hundred feet up at the time, and was observed trying to plane down, when the machine seemed to get out of control. It fell with a terrible crash."

Hundreds of people witnessed the sensational spectacle, and the general opinion was that the aviator could surely not come out of the ordeal alive. His mechanics, who had

been awaiting his return to the tent used as a hangar, were the first to reach the wreck, and it was with much difficulty they removed him from the tangle. In another report, he was described as ... "found in a dazed condition with his legs jammed among the wreckage." They were shortly joined by Mr. Headford, an Army Medical Corps living nearby, who witnessed the accident. He and Mrs. W. Percival (mother of Edgar) rendered first aid, stopping the bleeding from severe wounds in his head and legs. "Two medical men were also promptly brought to the crash site in motor cars. The unfortunate aviator was conveyed to the Windsor Hospital, four miles away, in one of the Army Medical Corps waggons (sic)" ... where upon he was to spend ten days in a coma and some two months recovering from his injuries.

On 5 September 1912, 'The Sydney Morning Herald' reported "... the spectators noticed that his motor had stopped. He thereupon tried to plane down, but the machine dipped and rushed headlong to earth." It is noted that in this report, Mr. Headford is described as "... leading officer in the local ambulance corps".

The Parnell and Boughton publication, 'Flypast', reports that Esk Sandford "... believed the engine had been switched off as the switch was in the off position after the accident yet the control wires were intact,". 'Flypast' also reported that on 15 September 1912, Bill Hart declared his intention to give up aviation and resume his profession of dentistry."

When Bill had his accident, which was, in fact, a near death experience for this 27-year-old aviator, he had, during the previous twelve months, been experiencing situations which few, in any, aviators and certainly no member of the public had encountered. He was a true pioneer of powered flight.



*Hart's crashed monoplane - 4 Sept 1912 - (NLA)*



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# MONOPLANE FALLS.

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## MR. HART INJURED.

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### ENGINES STOP IN MID-AIR.

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**RICHMOND, Wednesday.**

Mr. W. Hart, the aviator, who recently completed the building of a new monoplane, was flying to-day, and met with a serious accident at about 5.30 this evening.

It was his third trial of the machine. Hitherto he had only flown around the aviation ground, but to-day he ventured out across the river flats, and made a beautiful flight.

When returning to the tent, and whilst up in the air about 200 feet, the spectators noticed that his motor had stopped. He thereupon tried to plane down, but the machine dipped and rushed headlong to earth.

The mechanics waiting at the aviation tent rushed to the spot, to find the monoplane a terrible wreck.

The engine, which is in the fore part of the structure, had partly buried itself in the ground. Mr. Hart was found still in his seat in a dazed state. His legs were jammed among the wreckage, and it was with difficulty that he was released.

Mr. Headford, the leading officer in the local ambulance corps, was one of the first on the scene, and his timely aid in preventing the bleeding, was an important factor in saving the young man's life.

Dr. Helsham was summoned from Richmond, and Dr. Fullerton from Windsor, by motor bicycles. It was found that Mr. Hart has a nasty fracture of the left leg, whilst the right kneecap is badly broken. There are also ugly wounds on his head, and injuries to his back. The Army Medical Corps conveyed him to the Windsor Hospital in their ambulance waggon.

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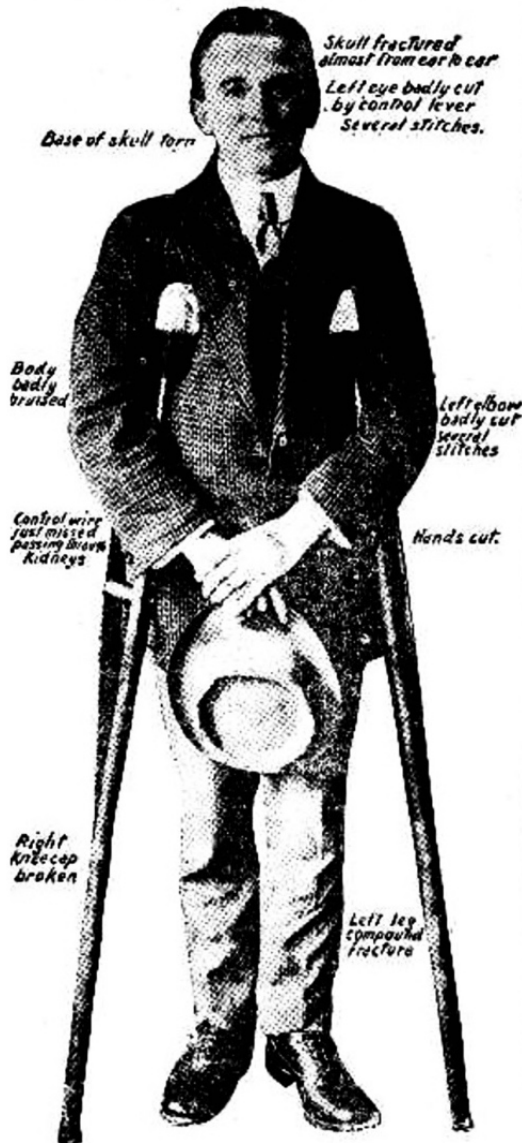


## THE "BIRDMAN" PHILOSOPHER

AUSTRALIA'S FIRST AVIATOR TELLS OF HIS  
SMASH-UP AND COMPLETE RECOVERY.

WILL FLY AGAIN NEXT MARCH.

For the "Sunday Times" by W. E. HART.



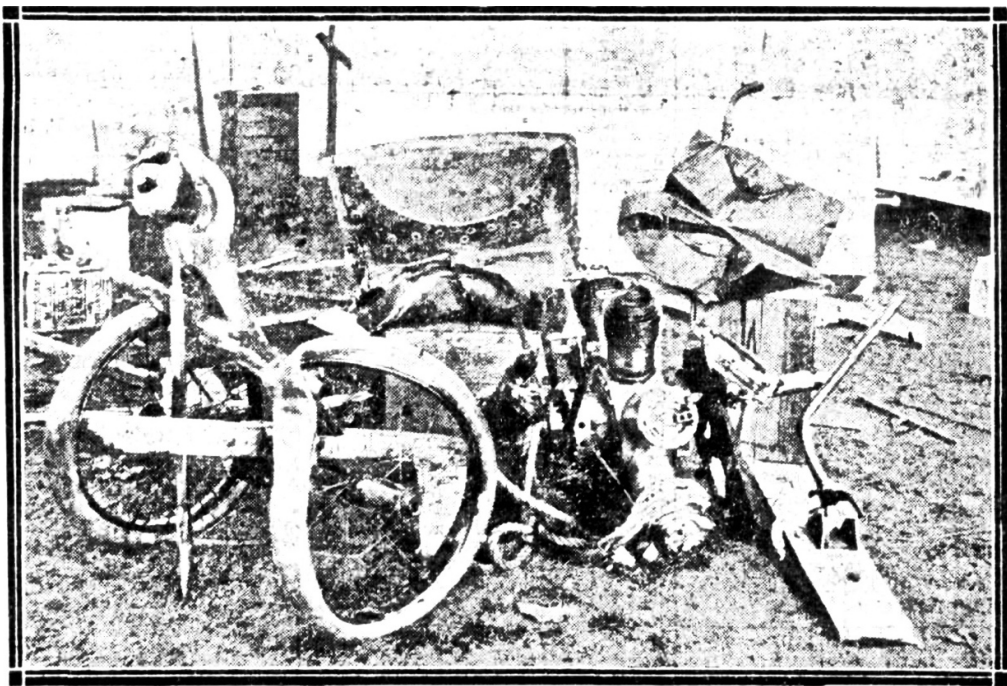
*Sunday Times - p23 - 8 Dec 1912 - The Birdman*

Edgar W. Percival, who lived next to Billy Hart's airfield, retells the story, the day that Billy came to Earth with a thud.

"Not only did Billy Hart fly the aircraft he bought (the Bristol Boxkite Biplane in 1911), I helped him, to some extent, in building a monoplane (in 1912) ..... which had some

unfortunate results on his first flight in it. As he was circling around the airfield, at quite a distance away and coming in to make what would have been his first landing, he made an unfortunate approach and what, afterwards, we knew to be – stalling the wing. He dived into the ground from about 300 feet (most reports say 200ft -Ed). It was a very bad crash indeed as most of his bones in his body were broken.” “It so happened, that this crash happened only a few hundred yards from the front of our house. Had it not been for my mother running out and pulling him out of his broken-up cockpit of the aircraft and removing a balaclava type knitted helmet, he wouldn't have been able to breathe. He would have died within a few minutes, if she didn't pull him out of the machine. This was all, long before anyone else arrived” - **Percival, Edgar Wikner – Digital Sound Collection - National Library Australia, Interviewed by Neil Bennetts, 17th Feb. 1980, Sydney.**

In 'The Cumberland Argus' - p6– 23 Nov 1912 – article corroborates what Edgar has said: “... Mrs. Percival who really saved the aviator's life. The fall took place near Mrs Percival's residence, and that lady with fine composure, immediately set to work to prevent the aviator from being smothered and warned the men, who afterwards came to her assistance, to be most careful about the use of lights, as petrol was drenching both Mr. Hart and the machine.”



HART'S WRECKED MONOPLANE.

A portion of the remains of Hart's monoplane, showing the 50 h.p. Gnome engine, the controlling lever, and the broken chassis.

*Hart's wrecked monoplane - (The Sun -p12 - 7 Sept 1912)*

In another newspaper report, dated 23 September 1912 – 'The Daily Telegraph' - “While Mr. Hart is not posing as a poor man, his expenditure has been quite considerable. Before setting out on the construction of his monoplane, he had sunk something like

£2000 in his enterprise, of his own personal account. The wrecked monoplane, which he had only just completed, represented a loss of £800. To reconstruct it would mean anything up to £500. And while this last item represents a loss to the company into which he had floated the concern, his own shares amount to some £1200 out of the £3000 subscribed."

There are a number of articles welcoming Bill home from hospital. First one is from 'The Cumberland Argus', dated 2 November 1912. Its heading declared:

## **HOME AGAIN – WELCOME TO OUR PLUCKY AVIATOR**

"Mr. W. Hart, jnr., the (mended) Australian aviator, is back again with us. He came home by car on Thursday evening, and - fearful odds-taker that he is - he was 'at the pictures' the same evening.

Think of it! Eight weeks ago, he was lying in a mangled wreck, so to speak, same as his machine. Given a bright temperament, a healthy air (good advertisement for our neighbouring district of Windsor), fine surgical and nursing attention and a clean physical frame, and there's the result. We had an hour's chat on Friday morning with the repaired young birdman; and what he poured out (at his favourite rate, '60 miles an hour') would fill a book, or, as the Bishop's vulgar boy put it, 'forty blooming books. 'The broken kneecap is as flexible as a Sackville pressman's elbow; his other leg is mended but is not yet strong enough to be trusted alone. (Like the little nippers, or the amateur aviators!)

Yesterday the youthful William was to be out in the motorcar ... it seemed to us that the trip was going to tax his gigantic modesty; the reception he was likely to get! For Parramatta was and will be delighted to see him again, virtually hale and well, even though (sic) he pillows a plastered leg gracefully in the car. For he comes back the same 'young Billy', with constitution undamaged, and his great recommendation to public favor (sic), his uncompromising naturalness and 'bon homie' (geniality – Ed) unimpaired. No 'side' about our recovered William. 'Will he fly again?' --- well that's a maybe. People will know by-and-bye. Sufficient for the day – doctors – is the recovery thereof.

The Mayor has convened a public meeting for next Tuesday, to arrange a public welcome home to the Parramatta history-maker."

The second article is from 'The Daily Telegraph', dated 7 November 1912. Its heading affirmed:

## **WELCOME HOME TO AVIATOR HART**

"A meeting called by the Mayor of Parramatta, in response to a request, was held last night at the Town-hall for the purpose of taking steps to mark the sense of gladness

felt by the people of his native town at the wonderful recovery of Mr. Hart, the well-known aviator, from the serious injuries which the accident in his last ascent caused him. The Mayor congratulated Dr. Kearney on the pains which had been taken in the case of the **young airman, who had done so much to make the name of his town well known all over the world.** He considered that they should carry the doctor a vote of thanks.

Ald. Jago thought the return of their young friend from hospital was an occasion which should not be missed to mark the feeling in his favor (sic), and to give a fillip (a boost - Ed) to the movement intended to recoup Mr. Hart for the losses he had sustained. He expressed surprised that the Federal authorities should treat the case with apparent indifference, seeing that Mr. Hart had been doing work which would undoubtedly have an important effect upon the defence of Australia. He moved that they should hold a *conversazione* (social gathering – Ed), with a musical programme, and that tickets be issued for 2 shillings. The Mayor seconded the motion which was carried. The town clerk agreed to act as security. It was also resolved that a committee of ladies be called together to see to decorations. The arrangements of a programme were left to Mr. Stenmark. Dr. Kearney expressed the opinion that the patient would be as well as ever he had been.”

After the *conversazione* was held, the newspaper reported that “Mr. W.E. Hart wishes to tender his sincere THANKS to the Mayor and Committee who instituted and carried out the ‘Welcome Home’ tended to him Tuesday evening last; also, to the Public, who responded so well to make it such a gratifying success.”

In this third article we can see that Bill Hart had quite a sense of humour. Also, it displays just how the Parramatta Council and the Public were genuinely appreciative of Bill’s recovery.

The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate – 30 November 1912.

## **WELCOME HOME** **W.E. HART DEMONSTRATION.**

“On Tuesday evening, at Parramatta Town Hall, his old home district welcomed back – fairly thoroughly recovered after his very severe accident up Windsor way, and consequent treatment in the Windsor Hospital – Mr. W.E. Hart, Australia’s first aviator. The arrangements were in the hands of a committee, whose fine work to make the demonstration a success was thorough and well thought out. And a success the demonstration undoubtedly was made. Among those present were representative ladies and gentlemen from all parts – social identities, professional men, and men of every department of industrial life. And it was in truth a welcome back to “home” to the plucky young aviator, in whose honor (sic) it all had been organised. The Mayor of Parramatta (Alderman A.H. Collett) presided. Alderman W.F. Jago (ex-Mayor) was the hon. treasurer of the effort, and the town clerk (Mr. S. Davies) Hon. secretary. Mr. T.O. Stenmark was musical director. On the platform were, besides the guest of the evening

and his parents Mr. and Mrs. W. Hart, of Parramatta, Dr. Helsham, the matron of the Windsor Hospital, Mrs Percival (whose knowledge, sympathy, and fertility of resource were so valuable when first aid was being rendered to Mr. W.E. Hart immediately after his accident). Also were noticed: Mrs. Joseph Cook, Mr. and Mrs. T.R. Moxham, Mrs. Marsden, Alderman W.P. and Mrs. Noller, Dr. Mrs. W.S. Brown, Mrs. Jago, and numerous children and relatives of Mr. and Mrs. W. Hart, sen.

A musical and elocutionary programme was negotiated during the evening, the chief items of which were enjoyable selections played by Mr. J. Finlayson's string band; admirably rendered songs Miss Arline Cross, "O Moonlight Deep and Tender," "A Ripple of Melody," "Bird on the Wing," and "Fountain"; Miss Pepper, "A May Morning"; Mr. A. Finn, "I'll sing thee songs of Araby"; Mr. Stenmark, "Song of the Sword"; and items by Mr. S. Shipway and Mr. F. Barber. Miss Leila Jeffery was must successful, too, in her violin numbers." Mazurk de concert" and "Scherzo." Miss Marjorie Percival accompanied Miss Jeffery, and Mr. A. Watsford also took some of the duties in a similar connection.

During the evening Mr. Jago, who was an indefatigable master of ceremonies, presented Mrs. Percival (whose appearance was the signal for great cheering with a handsome gold bracelet, engraved with the following words: **"From Mr. and Mrs. Hart, to Mrs. Percival, for kindness rendered to W.E. Hart, Australia's first aviator, 3.9.'12."** (Many newspapers confirm that it was the 4<sup>th</sup> not the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1912 – Ed). The gift was, of course, intended to express to the recipient the deep sense of gratitude entertained by Mr. and Mrs. Hart and family in respect of the salutary character of the first aid she rendered to Mr. W.E. Hart when he fell and sustained his late severe injuries. Great cheering signalled the presentation, and Mrs. Percival came forward and said just the right things. Certainly, her speech was no "set piece", but it was womanly, and like her actions after the now historical accident, just the right thing, and like them in further degree prompted by a kind, true heart and a clear brain.

During the evening speeches were made by different gentlemen, and the names of the doctors who had attended our aviator after his smash up, and of the matron at Windsor, under whose care he was so quickly nursed back to health, were greeted with most enthusiastic acclamation. Mayor Collett, Mr T.R. Moxham, M.L.A., and Alderman W.F. Jago each spoke a piece. Each voiced, though in a slightly different manner to his fellows, the congratulations of his fellows, the congratulations of his fellow Australians generally, but more particularly of his fellow-townsmen of Parramatta, to Mr. W. E. Hart upon his convalescence; and advice – all sorts of advice – was given to him in relation to future exploits in the air.

**But Mr. W.E. Hart's reply was the "piece de resistance" of the evening.** When he rose to speak, all rose to cheer; and the strains of "For he's a jolly good fellow" rang through the building. The young fellow was on his crutches, but for an instant or two he stood without them, for the benefit of those assembled – to show how far advanced he was towards perfect health again. "And in a few weeks." Said he, "I hope to be as sound as ever." He thanked Parramatta and the rest of the old home district for the kindly welcome back, and he thanked, publicly, in turn, Mrs. Percival, his medical advisers and patches up (Drs. Kearney, Helsham, Fulton, and Hinder), the matron of the Windsor Hospital, and the nurses there. He thanked the kind friends of Parramatta who had

organised that welcome home. Parramatta was a dear spot in his heart, and he intended to come there and settle down. (That piece of news was loudly applauded, of course.)

There was some quaint humour in his remarks, too, which produced roars of laughter. He had received cables of sympathy from England, he said, and **letters from counts** – accounts rendered. It was better he thought that they were met for such a purpose that evening, than to take steps to erect a memorial to him. They could all sympathise, too, with one of his kind friends, who had been informed that the accident was due to his “having a drop too much,” and with his friend’s regret that so young a man should give way to drink.

Referring to the future, Mr Hart said he had promised his parents not to go in for flying professionally. He was having a new machine built – (laughter) but Mr. Sandford would fly her. They would want to take care, however, that he did not fall into the machine one of these days.

The Hon. Jos. Cook. M.H.R., sent the following interesting letter of apology: “I very deeply regret my inability to be with you on Tuesday evening next. It would have been to me an intense delight to join you in extending to Mr. Hart our sincere and kind congratulations on his recovery, and to wish him good luck and good fortune in the future. Parramatta honors itself in honoring Mr. Hart, who has proved himself to be one of the most plucky and gritty of her sons. All pioneering is dangerous and costly, but the kind he has undertaken is especially so. And it is due from those of us who like the more solid earth to tread upon, to show our sense of the value we attach to the daring feats of an intrepid and public-spirited man. Mr Hart is the first in Australia to attempt risky and dangerous enterprise in a serious and adequate manner. And to him will always belong the honor and credit of being the first Australian to push his way through the initial difficulties of a science which, later on, is to bring greater security and prosperity to the nation. This, and much more, I should have liked to say at the meeting, had the fates been kind enough to allow me to be there. In the circumstances I can but wish you a happy and successful gathering.”

An apology was also to hand from Colonel Burns, who explained therein his inability to be present, and his good wishes for Mr. Hart’s future health and prosperity.

At interval in the evening’s proceedings, ladies of the committee served refreshments to those present, and all spent an enjoyable time, when the lull in the music and the speech-making had come, in pleasant social intercourse. For there was nothing stiff nor formal about the demonstration. It may be said that the decorations in the hall were most effective about the proscenium, reflecting infinite credit upon those to whom the committee had entrusted this part of the work. This was the work of the ladies’ committee.”



**AVIATOR HART.**

Aviator Hart, who is now able to get about the city streets, says that he will soon be ready for another flight. Mr. Headford, of Richmond, whose "first-aid" was of so much service after the monoplane accident, has received a letter from the aviator. In his letter Mr. Hart says:—"You will be pleased to hear that I am getting on well. I am aware of your invaluable aid to me, both on the ground and in transporting me to the hospital, and at that institution. You have my deepest thanks for your attention, and I am glad of the opportunity to express my gratitude."

Mr. Headford is a staff-sergeant at Richmond in the Army Medical Corps. He holds two ambulance certificates, three life-saving diplomas, and is a member of the Royal Life-saving Society's instructional staff.

*Letter to Headford from Hart - (Sunday Times - p22 - 26 Jan 1913)*

However, the attention of the media towards him soon lessened for, after all, he was no longer making aviation headlines for the newspapers – he was no longer a newsworthy person, although articles about him and interviews with him continued to be published, but at a considerably reduced rate than during his flying career.

On the day of Bill Hart's "mishap", we assume that he was still making money from his fame as the Testimonial advertisement below proves.

**CATALOGUES, TESTIMONIALS, AND REFERENCES  
CAN BE SEEN AT**

'Phone, City 916.

**LOWE BROS.,**

49 Sussex-street.

Also in stock, "Sintz" Reversing Propellers, collapsible Canvas Boats, "Waterman" Pumping Outfits.

Amongst users of the "Waterman" Motors is Mr. William E. Hart, the Australian Pioneer Aviator, who speaks in most glowing terms of the efficiency of these famous Engines. Mr. Hart will only be too pleased to testify to their several merits.

*Hart Testimonial for Waterman Motors – (SMH p12 - 4 Sept 1912)*



## CHAPTER 20

### WAR AND DENTISTRY - HART'S LATER YEARS

The injuries Bill received from the aeroplane crash on 4 September 1912, helped him determine what his future would be – a return to his profession of dentistry, with his interest in aviation simply a hobby.

He was 27 years of age.

By the end of 1912, he had recovered sufficiently from his injuries to commence establishing his new dental practice.

As he was no longer producing aviation news, any interest the media had in him soon declined. Surprisingly, it seems none of his colleagues from the Aerial League of Australia or from his aviation School, continued his work at Ham Common, although Bill himself continued developing a new biplane, which he flew on 19 January 1914, his first flight since his accident.

The aviation facilities at Ham Common lapsed into casual use until 11 February 1916, when the N.S.W. State Government announced the establishment of a School of Aviation on the site, which, in time, was expanded and became what we now know as 'RAAF Base, Richmond'. ('Flypast' by Parnell and Boughton, 1988).

Another of the newspaper articles held by the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney about him follows, (Cumberland Argus - 11 Jan 1913 - p6) - entitled 'Our Aviator'.

"This week we had a five-minute chat with that interesting personality, Mr. W.E. Hart, Australia's first aviator. He was just off to the Hawkesbury River, to fix up the engines of his father's motor-launch, so that pater might not be disappointed, and enjoy his fishing trip on the Saturday. Speaking to him in reference to the report that he did not intend to relinquish aviation, Mr. Hart said: 'Yes, it is quite true that I do not intend quitting the game altogether. Of course, my parents do not favour me devoting my time to the science, but I feel that I can do some for Australia. In a short time, an Aviation Corps will be formed, and although I could not think of accepting service in it, at the salary named, it has been suggested to me that I might accept service in it, at a salary named, it has been suggested to me that I might accept an honorary commission and thus place myself in the position of being able to give the corps the benefit of any experience I may have gained. The idea is acceptable to me, and I will embrace it. At present I am engaged in preparing plans for a new type of machine – a hydroaeroplane. This machine will be fitted with floats instead of runners and will be able to skim along the water or rise above and fly over the city. Mr. Roy Sandford will manipulate the machine when it is constructed, and no doubt I will have a trip in it myself. But flying is not going to get my individual attention. I am arranging to start a new practice in my profession as a dentist, and that will take up most of my time, but I think I will be able to give a little time to aviation'."

To summarise this article, it said the following:

1. Aviation will be his hobby.
2. The formation of the aviation corps.
3. The hydroaeroplane.
4. His new dental practice at Parramatta.

Although this article was written early 1913, the dental entry for his new dental practice in Parramatta did not appear in the PMG telephone directory until April 1915.

Below is a list of activities since Bill's accident, last September 1912:

**Early 1913:** Hart opened a dental surgery at Boomerang House, King Street, Sydney, but, by June, he moved his dental practice to 183 Pitt Street, Sydney, followed by a second surgery at Church and Phillip Streets, Parramatta, as evidenced by his business stationery.



*Letterhead for W.E. Hart's Parramatta Dental Practice*

# MY FIVE YEARS' GUARANTEE

## CERTIFICATE

### COVERS ALL MY DENTAL WORK.

WHEN YOU  
COME TO  
ME WITH  
YOUR TOOTH  
TROUBLES,  
YOU GET  
FREE,  
HONEST,  
AND  
CANDID  
ADVICE.

A tooth has to be exceptionally bad if I cannot save it, either with gold, amalgam, or what is becoming increasingly popular--my invisible fillings. I could make more money by advising plates, but my desire is to carry on a practice which must satisfy my conscience, and let me feel that I have done my work in the patient's best interests, at fees that are fair and moderate for the high skill I am able to display.

You do not rush to have a sore toe cut off. Why sacrifice your teeth? There is more logic in having your toe off. You wouldn't have a tooth out if it could be avoided, if you only knew to what extent your general health depends upon sound teeth.

I admit myself second to none at making plates, and believe I learned, while on active service, many things about such work that are not generally known; but I do not believe in sacrificing a patient's practically good teeth merely because there is more profit on a plate than in the proper use of a few up-to-date stoppings.

**HOURS—**  
Mon., Wed., Frid., 9 to 9.  
Tues., Thurs., 9 to 6.30.  
Sat. till 1.

LET ME ADVISE YOU FREE OF CHARGE  
on your dental requirements. I will honestly tell you just what is necessary to guarantee your future tooth health. My advice will be straightforward and honest. ALL OPERATIONS, EXTRACTIONS, ETC., ABSOLUTELY PAINLESS.

TERMS MAY BE ARRANGED.

**W. E. HART, THE CONSISTENT DENTIST.**  
(LATE LIEUT. AUSTRALIAN FLYING SQUADRON, A.I.F.)  
'Phone—City 4830.  
2nd Floor, BOOMERANG HOUSE,  
133 KING-STREET, SYDNEY.

(105)

DO YOUR DUTY AND BUY WAR BONDS.



*Letterhead for Boomerang House – W.E. Hart's Dental Practice*

**1 May 1913:** His company, Hart's Aviation Co. Ltd., was wound up voluntarily, but he continued to use its facilities at Ham Common for his aviation 'experiments'.

**1 July 1913:** He still continues his appeal, in late 1911, to encourage the building of a defence force consisting of aircraft and locally trained pilots. He offered his services to the Commonwealth Government. Speaking to an 'Evening News' reporter, he said, "I believe I could be of some practical value to my native country in the event of war." He continued, "I wrote to senator Millen and Prime Minister Cook yesterday ... I want to prove, if ever I get the chance, that the airship (sic) will be a useful engine of war."

**27 July 1913:** Bill was interviewed by a journalist from 'The Sunday Times'.

It had the heading: THERE IS VERY LITTLE IN FLYING - "Aviation!" said Mr. Hart in a jocular tone. "Have you come to the right place? I am a dentist!" The interview went on from that point and would be one of the longest, if not the longest, ever given by Bill Hart. In another part of the interview, Bill reflected on the number of fatalities in flying. By then, he would have known about his young flying instructor, L.F.

MacDonald, who died with his passenger mechanic, Harry England, early that year in January. – Bill continued: "A very noticeable fact in connection with the fatalities of the past twelve months is that over 75 per cent occurred to professional and proved good fliers, whilst very few of the beginners got hurt. This is easily accounted for, as, for the beginners, aviation holds unknown dangers, and consequently they are very careful, and do not attempt risky flights in bad weather. The professionals, however, get so used to flying that they think no more of going up on a dangerous day than an ordinary person does of entering a tramcar. They are so used to their machines that they lose the sense of danger, and consequently take unnecessary risks, too frequently paying a bitter price for their over-confidence."

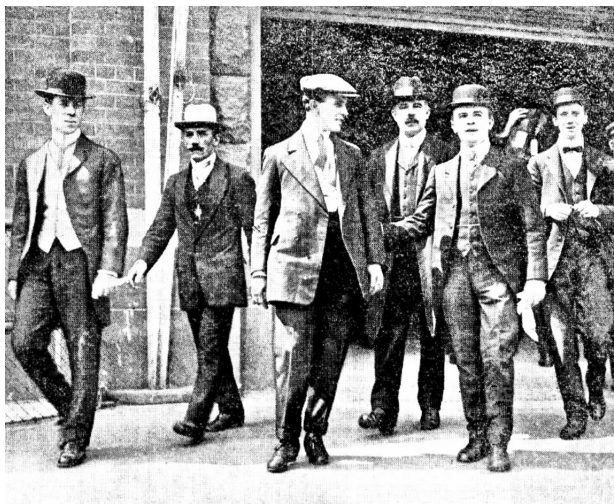
**July to December 1913:** After a young Herbert John Louis 'Bert' Hinkler returned from New Zealand to Australia with A.B. Stone 'Wizard' Stone in June 1913, the intervening time between then and his birthday in the following December when he became legally of age "... was spent in a position in the 'aeroplane works' of William E. Hart, to whom he refers as the Number one on the list of Australian airmen ...". ('Solo', by R.D. Mackenzie, published 1962.). Bert Hinkler left Bill Hart's employ after his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday to travel to England to further his aviation career. According to the publication, "Great Flights", by Norman MacMillan, published 1964 by G. Bell & Sons Ltd, London, A.B. Stone never taught Bert Hinkler to fly, but it seems neither did Bill Hart!

**Year 1914:** Bill sold his 50 h.p. Gnome rotary engine to the Kalgoorlie Aero Syndicate (Western Australia) for £50 to be fitted to the syndicate's new biplane and the monoplane in which he crashed. The Syndicate did order an engine from overseas, but it did not arrive. There was a war on, and all plane parts were diverted for the war effort. So, Hart's engine was an obvious choice. Unfortunately, on arrival the engine was found to have two cracked pistons. Replacement pistons casts were made at the Kalgoorlie Foundry. This plane had its first flight on the 26 May 1915. Licenced pilot, Arthur Geere, was at the controls. It managed a height of 30 feet across a local racecourse.

**19 January 1914:** Bill test flew the new biplane he had designed and built. This was his first flight since his accident in September 1912. On one of another three flights, he carried a passenger, Mr. James White, of Neutral Bay. The testing stopped when the aircraft's undercarriage was damaged on landing. A storm later blew down its tent. 'The Sun' -p9 – HART FLIES AGAIN – Extract: "The first time I went up", he said, "I felt almost the same as I did when I made my first flight several years ago. I had completely lost the instinct of controlling the levers which comes with experience ... today I found I had to watch every little movement and think what I had to do. It showed me that flying is not like swimming. You can easily forget what you have learnt, and it is only by constant practice that you can keep expert."

On the same day, 19 January 1914, another Australian pioneer aviator, Harry Hawker, arrived in Sydney. He had just arrived by train from Melbourne. According to his biography, 'Hawker', written by L.K. Blackmore and published in 1990, Hawker's exploits in England, "... had been widely reported in the Australian press so he arrived in Australia as something of a hero and in an atmosphere of 'local boy makes good.'". Great crowds turned out whenever he carried out flying demonstrations."

#### **ARRIVAL OF AVIATOR HAWKER** **(The Daily Telegraph - 19 Feb 1914 – p9)**



#### **SOME PERSONALITIES IN THE AUSTRALIAN FLYING SPHERE**

*From left to right: Mr G. A. Taylor (secretary of the Aerial League), Mr. Penfold (Balloonist and Certified Pilot), Mr Harry G. Hawker, Mr. Bloomfield (his secretary), Mr. Hart (Australian Aviator), Mr. Claude Kingston (manager to Mr Hawker)".*

Hart, being the first Australian to gain fame as an aviator, was soon to meet other Australian aviators or potential aviators. He at all times inspired, trained and mentored all that crossed his path. He was visionary, in the way of seeing the bright future of many able aviators. Harry Hawker is one that Billy Hart could predict great things were yet to come.



LOOPING THE LOOP ON AN AEROPLANE.

*Argus Melbourne - (7 Feb 1914 - p10)*



*Australian Worker Sydney - (26 Feb 1914 - p 17)*

Unfortunately, Harry had only a decade's worth of aviation experience as his life, was cut short in 1921. Background to his pioneering aviation life:



Harry George Hawker was born 22 January 1889 and died 12 July 1921. Starting off as a mechanic, he left Australia for England and ended up as the chief test pilot for Sopwith and he designed many of their aircraft. He co-founded the Hawker Aircraft after WWI. He died when the aircraft he was flying in the Aerial Derby crashed at Hendon Aerodrome.

In an article written by W.E. Hart in 1914, and reprinted by other newspapers, **Hart uses the magnificent flying feats of Harry Hawker to show Australia how far aviation has come as well as how far we are behind compared to other nations.** Hart looking into the cockpit of Hawker's plane was an eye-opening moment. I liken it to our modern times, when we had a sudden technological leap when we left rotary-dial phones and took up smartphones. -Ed)

## WHAT THE FLIGHTS MEAN GREAT OBJECT LESSON TO AUSTRALIA - HAWKER'S PROWESS Globe, Saturday 28 February 1914 - **(By W.E. HART)**

"I feel like the boy with the soap - I won't be happy, etc.



(Advertising -Weekly Times - 8 Mar 1919 - Won't be happy!)

Of the 20,000 spectators present at the Randwick Racecourse on the occasion of Hawker's first flight in Sydney. I believe I was the most interested, and certainly at the start the most nervous. But what a great combination – man and machine. In my opinion Hawker's is undoubtedly the best machine in the world. Certainly, it is the very latest

type, and the man – well, on his performance we know him to be one of the world's foremost aviators.

## A POTENT LESSON

What aroused our enthusiasm on Saturday afternoon, was really, to Hawker, everyday flying. But it brought home to us very vividly how far we are behind the times in aviation in Australia. The full significance of this lamentable fact was realised when we saw what could be done with a modern machine and a good man at the wheel. I was simply amazed at the wonderful strides made in machines since the days of my old 50h.p. Bristol. I was proud that the one who demonstrated to us in such a capable way, man's control over the air, was **a fellow Australian**. I find it hard to describe the sensations I experienced yesterday afternoon. But through it all runs a feeling of admiration for Hawker's beautiful control.

Several years ago, when it was a great feat to fly in a wind of five miles an hour, an airman said that given power and speed he could go up in a hurricane. Just how true this man's words were demonstrated yesterday afternoon. I was astounded to find that the little biplane, with a 26ft span, fitted with an 80h.p. engine, could climb as quickly even when carrying a passenger. It proved to me that speed was everything, and I realised that Mr. Hawker was right when he remarked to me a few days ago, **"You will be simply paralysed when you see how my little 'bus climbs."**

## THE WONDER OF THE MODERN MACHINE

After the experience I gained by flying my old Bristol, and when I saw Hawker leave the ground and start to climb, at such a great angle, forgetting the strides made in flying in recent years, and the extra horsepower and speed of his machine, I could hardly restrain myself from shouting, "Flatten her out, flatten her out." Then I began to realise that it was not my old "bus" that was up, but a modern machine, capable of flying 95 miles an hour and climbing at the rate of 1400ft a minute. Wonderful!

Straight up the aviator went, doing what would be fatal in a less efficient machine – banking on climb. Still climbing at about one in three, and all the time as steady as a rock, he treated us to an exhibition of banking which at times must have been fully 75deg., followed by beautiful spiral volplanes and nose dives.

## CLIMBING 20 MILES AN HOUR

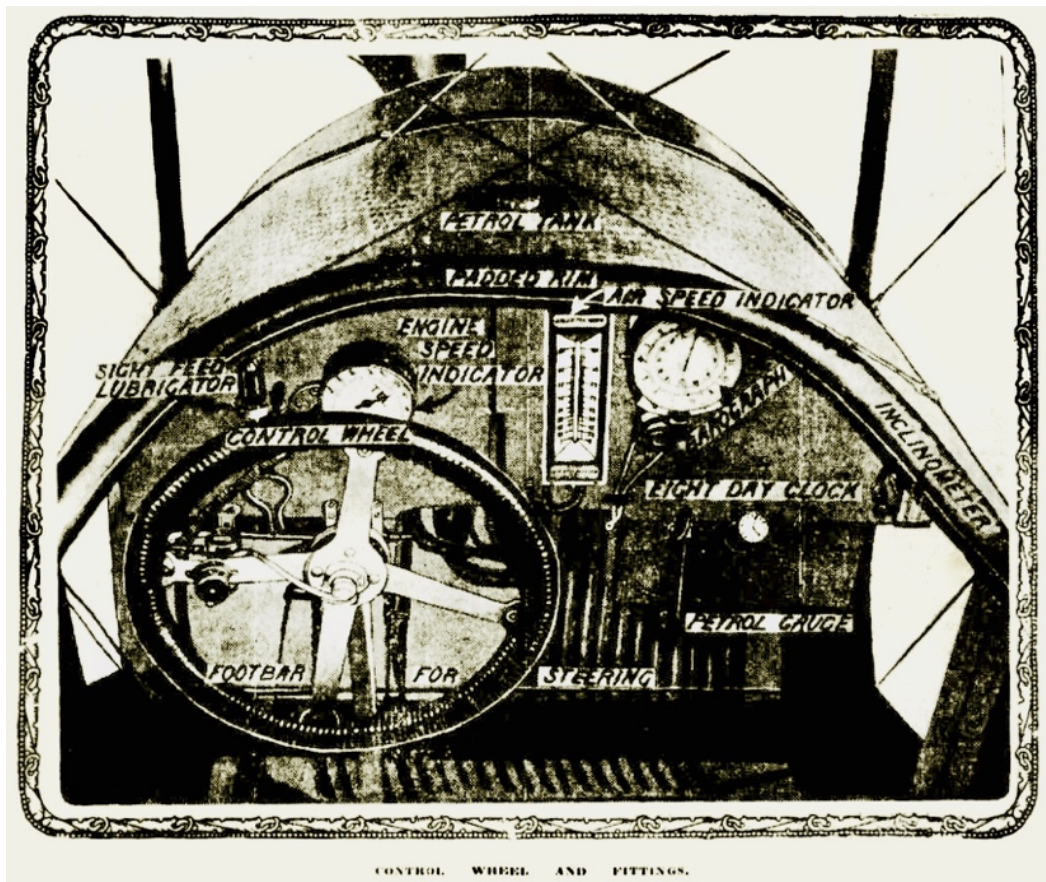
One can hardly realise that Hawker actually climbs up into the air at a "vertical" rate of 20 miles an hour. But this is what his little machine does.

I appreciated the exhibition all the more on account of the fact of having flown over 5000 miles in the air and ascended to over 6700ft myself. Only on two occasions have I seen an aeroplane in actual flight, while I have never seen a machine more than 500ft in the air in my life. For that reason, Hawker's exhibition was a revelation to me as the public will probably remember that I have never been out of Australia in my life, having

gained all my experience locally. Up till now very few of the public have realised what perfect control an airman has over his craft, and although we saw Hawker flying right along the straight at one moment only a few feet from the ground, and the next minute well above the grandstand, by far his best work was done high up in the air. His spiral volplanes and steep banks were, from an aviator's point of view, magnificent. To demonstrate what control Hawker has over his machine, I venture to say that he could fly between two posts at 95 miles an hour with only a foot to spare on either side.

### ABSENCE OF PRELIMINARIES

A noticeable fact on Saturday was the absence of any preliminary adjustments or preparations. The machine was not even held back. The mechanic simply walked to the nose of the biplane, leisurely pulled the propeller, stepped clear, and away went machine. **It is quite a treat to view the Sopwith's snug little cockpit; in front of you are different meters which tell you at a glance your speed, altitude, engine revolutions, the degree of your banking, etc.**



*The Argus - Melbourne - 7 Feb 1914 - p10 - Hawker's Biplane Cockpit*

In response to my enthusiastic eulogies in reference to his machine, Hawker's only comment was, "Yes, she is some 'bus' this."

Australia needs aviation, and it needs it badly, because our largest centres are so far apart. With a machine like Hawker's, it is possible to go from Sydney to Melbourne and back again in a day.

Hawker's visit to Australia should give great fillip to local aviation. Personally, when I started flying, over three years ago, I thought it would be no time before I had half a dozen friendly competitors, and now, even after the lapse of time, excepting Hawker's, there is not one efficient machine in the Commonwealth. This is to be regretted, because every man we have sent Home (Great Britain) has made good; some particularly so, such as Hawker, Harrison, Busteed and Pickles. The above quartets in particular have gained world-wide reputations."

\* \* \* \* \*

Is it too much of a coincidence to think that it was Harry Hawker's influence (although he died in 1921) that caused the H.G. Hawker Engineering Company later in the 1920's to name its successful Hawker Hart aeroplane after our W.E. Hart? I have never seen any suggestion that it may be so, but ...? According to my 2008 edition of the Compact Oxford English Dictionary, the word, 'hart', means 'an adult male deer, especially a red deer over five years old' ... ORIGIN Old English.

**27 February 1914:** 'The Windsor and Richmond Gazette' – p3 – reported that "Mr. W. Hart has removed his biplane from the aviation grounds at Clarendon Common. It has gone to Parramatta, and Mr. Hart will spend his spare time in repairing the machine which was badly damaged when the tent was blown down in a recent gale. Mr. Hart will fly again as soon as he gets his wings repaired."

**21 April 1914:** The French aviator, Maurice Guillaux, who had arrived in Sydney as the first stop of the world tour, gave an exhibition of aerobatics flying his specially designed Bleriot X1 'looper' aircraft at Victoria Park Racecourse in Zetland on this day before a small crowd of invited people. 'The Sydney Morning Herald' - p11 - reported: "These were the serial antics of the French aviator, M. Maurice Guillaux. Startling as were these exhibitions, they were merely the prosaic prelude of what was to follow, for, after waving his hand fairly to the cheering onlookers, he once more soared aloft, and for the first time in Australia preformed that daring evolution known as looping the loop." ... "One of the first who congratulated Giullaux was Hart, Australia's pioneer aviator."

**Year 1915:** A lot of letter writing and visits to Government officials. As an aside, Bill Hart, was one of the first dentists in Australia to use gas in his dental work. It is reported he extracted his 15-year sister's front teeth using gas to prove a point to a doctor's friend! ('Advertiser' 20 May 1987).

**10 July 1915:** Having written 10 days previously to another officer in the Defence Department and been referred, Bill wrote to the secretary of Defence, Melbourne, about "... doing his bit ..." and serving with an aviation contingent and being sent to England, etc.

**29 July 1915:** He was interviewed, as a result of which he was advised he would be contacted "... in the event of a vacancy occurring ...".

**14 December 1915:** he made written "... application for an honorary commission in the Australian Flying Corps (AFC) for the forthcoming school of instruction ...".

**20 December 1915:** Although not an officer, it was recommended that "... as a special case, he be granted an honorary commission in the AFC and be permitted to join the forthcoming course at the Flying school."

**24 December 1915:** His recommendation approved by 'Minister of State for Defence.'

**YEAR 1916:** Military Service

**14 January 1916:** He enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) with the rank of lieutenant in the AFC's Number 1 squadron.

**16 March 1916:** No.1 squadron sailed from Melbourne for the Middle East.



*Lt. William E. Hart (AFC)*



**14 April 1916:** No.1 squadron disembarked at Suez. The squadron had no aircraft and most of its flying officers, including Bill Hart, were sent to England for further training. It was reported whilst in Egypt that he suffered from blackouts. For medical reasons, his duties were restricted to ground instruction only.

The Sydney Morning Herald, 27 May 1916.  
**THE AUSTRALIAN FLYING CORPS.**



*Australian War Memorial*

*A04544*

Members of the Australian Flying Corps, who left for the front in March last, after completing their course in Victoria. Lieutenants Hart and Badgery, well known as aviators in this State, are members of the corps.

1916 GROUP PORTRAIT OF OFFICERS OF No.1SQUADRON AUSTRALIAN FLYING CORPS (AFC). IDENTIFIED PERSONNEL ARE:

**BACK ROW:** LIEUTENANTS - A.L. MACNAUGHTON; C.J. BROOKES; A.D. BADGERY; C.A. KELLY; S. WOODROW; A.E. GEERE.

**CENTRE ROW:** Lt. R. ROSS; CAPTAIN W. SHELDON; MAJOR A. A. BROWN; LT COL. E.H. REYNOLDS. CAPTAIN R. WILLIAMS; Lt. E.G. ROBERTS; Lt. R.S. BROWN; Lt. S.J.L. TRELOAR.

**FRONT ROW:** LIEUTENANTS – P.H. MEWLAND; **W.E. HART**; L.J. WACKETT; CAPTAIN D.V.J. BLAKE; CAPTAIN W.H. ANDERSON. LIEUTENANTS – F.H. MCNAMARA and A. MURRAY JONES.

**5 May** (also reported as 28 April) **1916:** They embarked for England, arriving some 10 days later. On 25 August 1916, 'The Windsor and Richmond Gazette' reported Bill Hart as saying, "... whilst in England, he was located at Brooklands." Another newspaper quoted him as saying "... they had to dodge submarines as well as Zeppelins and cutting



through the dark waters one night with all lights out – not even allowed to smoke - they missed another darkened ship by only a few yards!"

**24 June 1916:** He embarked for Melbourne via Cape Town and Fremantle for discharge from the AIF – medically unfit due to ‘petit mal’ (epilepsy) and rheumatism.

The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate – 29 July 1916.

## YOUNG “BILLY” HART “AT HOME.”



### “NEVER SO NEAR DEATH IN MY LIFE”

Lieut. W.E. Hart, son of Mr. and Mrs. William Hart, of Parramatta, sending the above photo of himself and two pretty English girlies, writes: - “This is where we are staying. It is a lovely place, and the grounds are simply beautiful. There are glorious lakes at the back and boating. The country is marvellously picturesque. Fields of buttercups and everywhere masses of gold. It is something to be alive and to be here to enjoy it. Girls do a lot of the men’s work now. Remarkable, too, how they have got into the habit of smoking. Nothing at all to see them in the streets during the day smoking a cigarette. London is rather a rotten place for girls, though. A terrible lot on the streets, and it is simply pitiful to see it – some really pretty girls, too. It is nearly 10 p.m. and I am writing this (quite light enough) in a beautiful garden. There are about six aeroplanes over-head,

but the people never look up at them now – they are so used to it. **You have no idea how many fellows are killed here learning to fly. Five in one school here last week. I have just heard that a chap I was speaking to in the aerodrome this morning has been killed with his passenger.** ..... Well, I am sorry to say have been turned down for flying. Funny thing, one of the doctors who have examined me, Dr. Mills, was a great friend of

Dr. Hinder, and he said I had no right to be here and no right to be in the army, as Dr Hinder had told him all about my case. My nerves have gone to the very devil.

As the doctor told me, those injuries of mine will not stand too much. I had a couple of fairly bad turns in the air, and once when **I was up 2000 feet by myself, I suddenly went all wrong**, and I tell you I was never nearer being killed in my life. Another 500 feet, and I would not have got down. When I got down, I was all out. They will not allow me to fly any more. ... (A day or two later) .... My nerves are the deuce today, just watching fellows flying. My hands just shaking like leaves. It is as well I am turned down for aviation. Met Watkins, Wyley, Eric Wooster (Harris Park), Major Goodsell (of Parramatta) and quite a number of Parramatta people were in London the last few days. Enclosed photos, of nice family I spend weekends with. Fine people, wealthy, car, and all that, and two lovely little girls. (Still later.) I would not be surprised if they fired me back. All my old wounds are coming against me."

Lieut. Hart, it is expected, will be home in a fortnight.

**8 August 1916:** He had arrived in Melbourne.

### **BACK TO RELATIVES AND FRIENDS -** *(Daily Telegraph - p7 - 14 August 1916)*



*Some of the wounded who returned on Saturday being taken charge of by friends and relatives. Lieut. Hart, the Parramatta airman, is walking between (parents) Mr. Hart, senr., and Mrs. Hart. Bill Hart's sister Winifred Hart on left.*

**26 August 1916:** Bill is at No. 4 Australian General Hospital, Sydney, N.S.W., during a review of his medical history, he stated that "about 12 months after his accident (his aircraft crash in September 1912) Lt (Hart) had what he describes as a 'faint' whilst riding a motorcycle. He used to suffer from occasional attacks of dizziness. Three months ago, whilst flying at Brooklands, England, he had another 'faint'.

**11 September 1916:** discharged from AIF. Bill Hart was a willing volunteer, but his service time was cut short. His 240 day's service in the AIF shows that he spent 93 days in Australia, 86 days at sea, 14 days in the Middle East, and 47 days in England. (Bill's time was short in the service but he did give flying instruction from the ground. Also, the morale boost to have a known celebrity in the ranks would have been enormous, wherever he travelled. Much like Elvis being shipped off to Germany - Ed)

*Certified True Copy*

**AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES.**

**AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE.**

**Attestation Paper of Persons Enlisted for Service Abroad.**

No. \_\_\_\_\_ Name HART, William Ewart  
Unit Austn Flying Corps  
Joined on 14. 1. 16

**Questions to be put to the Person Enlisting before Attestation.**

1. What is your Name? ... Hart, William Ewart
2. In the Parish of \_\_\_\_\_ In or near the Town of Parramatta In the County of New South Wales
3. Are you a natural born British Subject or a Naturalized British Subject? (N.B.—If the latter, papers to be shown.) ... yes
4. What is your Age? ... 30 1/2
5. What is your Trade or Calling? ... Dental Surgeon
6. Are you, or have you been, an Apprentice? If so, where, to whom, and for what period? ... No.
7. Are you married? ... No.
8. Who is your next of kin? (Address to be stated) (Father) William Hart Wentworth Street Parramatta New South Wales
9. Have you ever been convicted by the Civil Power? ... No.
10. Have you ever been discharged from any part of His Majesty's Forces, with Ignominy, or as Incurable and Worthless, or on account of Conviction of Felony, or of a Sentence of Penal Servitude, or have you been dismissed with Disgrace from the Navy? ... No.
11. Do you now belong to, or have you ever served in, His Majesty's Army, the Marines, the Militia, the Militia Reserve, the Territorial Force, Royal Navy, or Colonial Forces? If so, state which, and if not now serving, state cause of discharge ... no
12. Have you stated the whole, if any, of your previous service? ... yes.
13. Have you ever been rejected as unfit for His Majesty's Service? If so, on what grounds? ... No.
14. (For married men, widowers with children, and soldiers who are the sole support of widowed mother)—Do you understand that no separation allowance will be issued in respect of your service beyond an amount which together with pay would reach eight shillings per day? ... yes
15. Are you prepared to undergo inoculation against small pox and enteric fever? ... yes

I, William Ewart Hart do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true, and I am willing and hereby voluntarily agree to serve in the Military Forces of the Commonwealth of Australia within or beyond the limits of the Commonwealth.

And I further agree to allot not less than two-fifths of the pay payable to me from time to time during my service for the support of my wife,††

Date 11. 2. 15 Signature of person enlisted. W. E. Hart

\* This clause should be struck out in the case of unmarried men or widowers without children under 18 years of age.  
†† Two-fifths must be allotted to the wife, and if there are children three-fifths must be allotted.

D. 2111/15A—CL 11159.



**October 1916:** Bill and his father sailed from Sydney for America. They received many letters and telegrams wishing them good luck and safe return. Among the telegrams was one from Sir Joseph Cook, former Prime Minister, and one from the current Prime Minister, Mr. W.M. Hughes, as well as letters of introduction from the state and Commonwealth Governments.

**Year 1917:** More dentistry and lectures

**28 October 1917:** Bill placed an advertisement in 'The Sunday Times', page 12, which was headed by a photo of himself sitting in a hand-drawn monoplane of the day.



**PIONEER IN AUSTRALIAN AVIATION,  
FIRST IN MODERN DENTISTRY.**  
Late Lieut. No. 1 Aust. Flying Corps.

**All the Latest Features in Modern Painless Dentistry as practised in the British and Allied Armies**

Whilst on active service, and during my stay in England and France, I had the opportunity of investigating the very latest improvements in MODERN Dentistry, as practised in the British and Allied Armies. MODERN Dentistry means positively painless Dentistry. Operations without a twinge.

In resuming my former practice I do so equipped with not only the very latest and most up-to-date mechanical assistance, but, more important still, with advanced technical knowledge, imparted to me by those famous army dentists who, because of the absolute necessity, have had to find a way to do what in the past, in dentistry, had always been considered the impossible.

Where extractions are necessary I guarantee that my method is absolutely and totally painless. Delicate fillings and bridge work are accomplished with as little pain as is entailed in the mere cutting of the hair. **YOU NO LONGER NEED FEAR THE DENTAL CHAIR.**



I impart, in my plate work, a quality, a finish, and an effect that can not be improved upon. That is only possible because of my recently acquired special technical knowledge. Your plate, done by me, is not obviously artificial. It reflects Nature's best efforts, and will amaze and deceive even your closest friends.

**I invite my old friends to patronise me at my up-to-date new consulting rooms**

Let me advise you, **FREE OF CHARGE**, on your dental requirements. I will honestly tell you just what is necessary to guarantee your future tooth health. Gold Fillings from 10/6. Amalgam Fillings from 5/. Partial Plates from ONE GUINEA. CROWN, BRIDGE, and PIVOT WORK a specialty.

All operating accomplished with an ether and entire absence and freedom from pain. All work guaranteed for FIVE YEARS. Guarantee certificate given in every case.

**MR. W. E. HART** ( HOURS, DAILY 9 TO 6  
OPEN FRIDAY EVENING TILL 9.  
SATURDAYS TILL 12. )  
**THE CONSISTENT SQUARE-DEAL DENTIST**  
**194a PITT STREET, SYDNEY** 2nd Door above Market Street (Left-hand Side)  
BUY WAR BONDS. Take Lift at First Landing



**Mr. W. E. HART, Dentist,**  
Sunday Times, 27 July 1919 - p14

**ANNOUNCEMENT:**

**Mr. W. E. HART,**  
The Consistent Square-deal Dentist.  
**194a PITT-STREET**  
(3rd Door from Market-street).  
Take Lift at First Landing.  
**'Phone: City 8930.**

**HOURS:**  
Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 9 to 9.  
Tuesday, Thursday, 9 to 6.30.  
Saturday, 9 till 1 o'clock.

Freeman's Journal, 17 Jan 1918 - p17

Notice the long hours he or his assistants had to work. (There was a strong movement against soldiers using their service as a marketing angle, however, obviously this didn't bother Bill. - Ed)

He described the address in Pitt Street as "my up-to-date new consulting rooms" which means another new address! I hesitate to question his new statement, "... during my stay in England and France ... ". Examination of his military record does not show any posting to France. So how did he get there? He could have flown as a passenger from

Brooklands, or some other nearby airfield? It's more likely that this statement was a bit of an aviator's /dentist's licence!

**11 November 1917:** 'The Sunday Times' - p5 - reported Bill Hart gave a lecture on Wednesday night at the Model Aero Club's rooms. His subject was 'Aviation Pioneers and aviation of Today'. "He touched on both the serious and amusing sides of the work of the early experiments and fliers and gave an interesting account of aviation in Australia. He paid a special tribute to the work of Laurence (sic) Hargraves (sic) and reviewed progress of aviation from as far back as 1812. Mr. Hart says that the British machines, on the whole, are the best, but the German engines are a little better than ours. He suggests that dirigibles will be used for commercial purposes in preference to heavier-than-air machines."

**30 November 1918:** Bill Hart wrote a letter to the Municipality of Parramatta offering parts for a proposed museum from the first Australian – built aeroplane (broken propeller) and of the first plane to fly to Parramatta.

**6 June 1919:** 'The Sydney Morning Herald' published the following notice: "The N.S.W. Branch of the Australian Aero Club confirmed the election of the following officers: President: H.C. MacFie, Sec/Treas: E.J. Hart, Council: Lt. W. Stutt (Richmond Flying School), Mr. Watson, Mr. Beamer, Mr. W.E. Hart (Late A.F.C.), Mr. Woods, Mr. Bignold.

**20 March 1920:** Bill left Sydney with his father, for Vancouver, Canada then Detroit, USA, on a business trip in relation to an invention he wanted to patent in connection with ignition for cars and motorcycles. 'The Cumberland Argus' - p10 - Extract - "A pleasant function took place last Thursday, when the employees of Hart, Hitchcock and Co's mill and yards at River road, Rosehill, bade bon voyage to their senior employer, Mr. W. Hart (snr.). Among the 50 employees assembled there were men who have served Mr. Hart for several years, one had been there for 35 years and others from 20 years down. Mr Hart's health was drunk with enthusiasm .... Mr W.E. Hart, Australia's pioneer aviator, was in town this week, fixing up matters prior to leaving on the 26<sup>th</sup> inst. on a trip to America. Mr. Hart has taken out patent rights for a big thing in connection with a motor ignition invention which, he says, will revolutionize ignition in certain cars. Mr. Hart who has had wide experience in motors, feels confident that his invention will prove a great success. He, accompanied by his father, will leave on the 26<sup>th</sup> inst. for Vancouver, and from there journey to Detroit, one of the biggest motor manufacturing centres in America. New York will also be visited.

## PERSONAL

Mr. W. Hart, sen., has booked his passage to America by the Niagara, to sail on February 21st. His son William will accompany him.

*Cumberland Argus - p6 - 6 Dec 1919*

Mr. W. E. Hart, the well known dentist and motorist, and pioneer aviator of Australasia, leaves to-morrow on the Makura on a trip to America, Britain, and the Continent. He expects to be away about eight months, and will visit all the principal motoring centres abroad. His trip is primarily in connection with an invention he has patented, in connection with ignition for cars and cycles.

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*Sunday Times - p21 - 28 Mar 1920*

**March 1921:** Bert Hinkler returned from England by ship, with his aeroplane, Avro Baby G-EACQ, in the hold. His arrival in Sydney on 18 March "... evoked no particular interest," He assembled his aeroplane "... for display at the Sydney Royal Show, where he stood in the background and renewed his association with his old employer, the Australian aviator, William Hart. Even then, Hinkler may not have been noticed had not Hart drawn attention of the newspapers to him. Incidentally, Hart gained a nice piece of press publicity for himself in the process and was quoted in a way which implied that it was he who had started Hinkler on his aviation career." (quotes from R.D. Mackenzie's book, 'Solo, the Bert Hinkler story', published in 1962).

**Year 1923:** It was reported that "... Bill Hart had purchased a baby Avro machine from Bert Hinkler."



HINKLER AND HIS 'PLANE.

#### PLANE GARAGED IN SYDNEY STREET

The City Motor Garage in Pitt Street, Sydney, is the only city garage to house a complete aeroplane. The 'plane belongs to W. E. Hart, and was originally purchased from Bert Hinkler, the Australian aviator, who has made a big name with the Avro Aeroplane Co. in England.—"Avro."

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*Smith's Weekly - 9 Aug 1924 - p24*

## AERIAL DERBY

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### Final Preparations at Richmond

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### DEFECTS CROP UP

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### COMPETITORS' BREAK-DOWN

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(BY OUR SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE.)  
RICHMOND AERODROME, Friday.

To-night, the night before the climax of this week of flying, finds competitors, pilots, mechanics, officials of the Aero Club, and everyone else connected with the meeting, tired, but more enthusiastic than ever.

*Daily Telegraph - 6 Dec 1924 - p7*



**6 December 1924:** The first light aeroplane competition in Australia was held at Richmond Aerodrome. The competition was organised by the Australian Aero Club (N.S.W. Section). Among the competing pilots listed in the official program was W.E. Hart, flying an Avro Baby, re-registered as G-AUAQ. 'The Sydney Morning Herald's' lengthy article on the race dated 9 December, stated the owner of the Avro Baby, fitted with a 35 h.p. Green engine, was W.E. Hart and the pilot of the aircraft was Capt. Cornish, who was placed fifth in the Derby and third in the Derby Handicap.

**Year 1925:** Bill was identified as the owner of the Avro Baby in the previous item, however according to the publication, 'Flypast', by Messrs. Parnell and Boughton, Appendix 7, the aircraft was not sold to him until February 1925. In the same year, it was sold to F. Fitzalan. Now, according to the Queensland Museum, Brisbane, at one stage the Baby Avro, was fitted with twin floats. It was owned at one time by the Australian Aircraft and Engineering Co (AA&E) at Mascot, where its registration lapsed. The aircraft was stored by its last owner JJ Smith in Victoria from 1931. In 1970, Hinkler's Avro Baby was restored by the Royal Queensland Aero Club at Archerfield and donated to Queensland Museum.

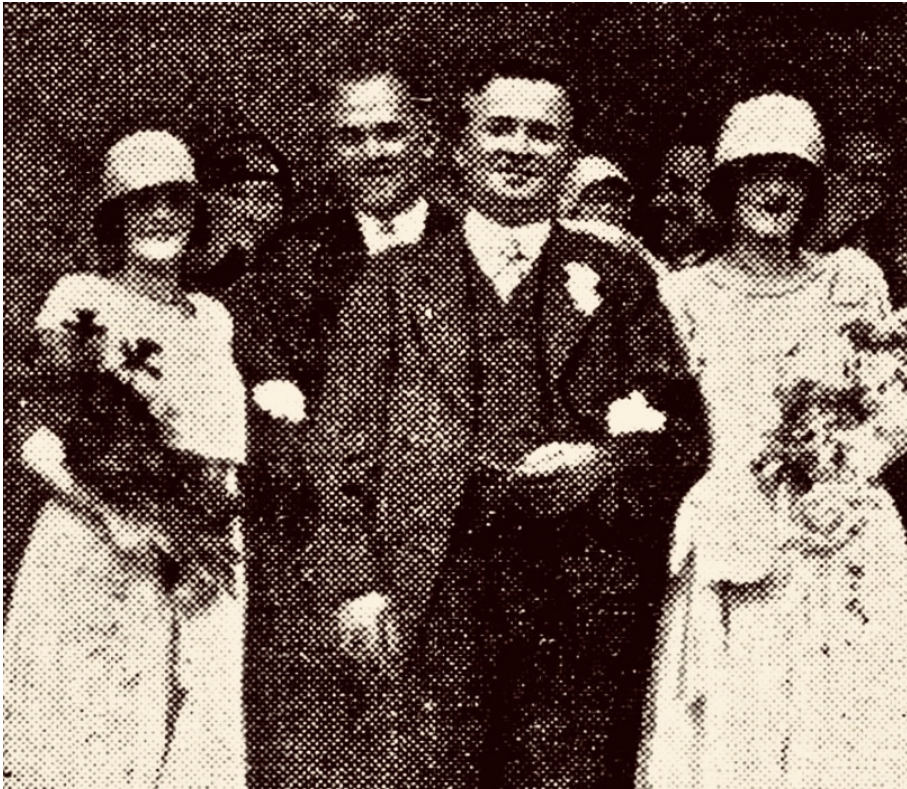
**26 January 1929:** 'The Sydney Morning Herald' published the following article on Monday, 28 January - p17: "The first aerial pageant organised by a private citizen in Australia was held at the Penrith aerodrome on Saturday, when a number of events, including two races prepared for by the Australian Flying Corps' Association, and controlled by officials of the New South Wales Aero Club, was decided. The promoter was Mr. Sydney Smith, senior, who prior to the start, entertained the officials at lunch at his home.

Mr. G. Hartman, president of the aero club, took the chair at the lunch, among those present being the pioneer Australian airman, Mr. W.E. Hart, Sir Keith Smith, and Flight-Lieutenant C.T.P. Ulm.

In proposing success to the Penrith Aerodrome, coupled with the name of the founder, Mr. Sydney Smith, Sir Keith Smith remarked that if more people would show practical interest in aviation, they would be helping to foster a public air sense. Referring to the presence of Mr. Hart, who made the first flights in Australia from the ground 20 years ago, Sir Keith said that he had seen the machine in which those historic flights had been made, and Mr. Hart was a braver man than he (the speaker) was. "I would not go up in a machine like that for any money," he added.

Flight-Lieutenant Ulm supported the toast, and complimented Mr. Sydney Smith on his efforts for aviation. He was satisfied that the Southern Cross or any large modern craft in Australia could land on the Penrith aerodrome."

**10 August 1929:** Bill Hart married Thelma 'Clare' Cock at St. Philip's Anglican Church in Sydney. They had one son, William, jnr. In the early 1950's, Bill's widow and son moved to Melbourne to be with Mrs. Hart's family. Over the years, the extended Hart family lost contact with his widow.



*Airman's Wedding - St Philip's Saturday Mr & Mrs W E Hart - Miss L Cock, bridesmaid  
(Monday -12 Aug 1929 - Daily Telegraph - p8)*

During my earlier research of Bill's life, there was never any mention of Mrs. W.E. Hart. On one occasion, I asked Nancy Bird Walton did she know whether Bill was married. She replied that she did not know for sure, but from the amount of time he spent at the Mascot facilities during her time there, she did not think he could not have been. I later learnt he had married before she started going to Mascot in August 1933, for flying lessons.

**24 April 1930:** The Australian Flying Corps association held its Annual Reunion Dinner at Dungowan Café, Martin Place, Sydney. It was attended by a number of prominent aviators, including Keith Smith, Charles Ulm, William Hart, Harry Cobby and Jerry Pentland, who autographed the menu card.

**1930's:** Bill visited the UK and the USA noting the latest developments in dentistry, which would enable him to introduce several new dental techniques in his practice on his return to Australia. Married life was good and Bill was rewarded with the birth of his son on 7 July 1936.

**1940's:** Bill offered his services to the Royal Australian Air Force as an aviator, but he was deemed medically unfit.

**29 July 1943:** Whilst along Bathurst Street, Sydney, Bill collapsed and died.

**30 July 1943:** 'The Sydney Morning Herald' - p4 - published a lengthy article reporting his death the previous day. This report contained a number of errors of fact. The circumstances of his death are recorded in the following newspaper article.

### **PIONEER PILOT'S DEATH – Body Found in City Lane**

“Mr. William Ewart Hart, 56 (sic) (Newspapers reported his age as 56. Even his death certificate says age 56. However, the maths says age 58. In times of bereavement, facts become jumbled. - Ed), pioneer Australian aviator and holder of No. 1 Australian (Flying) Licence, was found dead in Stuart Lane, off Bathurst Street, city, yesterday. Death was caused by a heart attack.

Mr. Hart, a city dentist, had left his surgery in Elizabeth street shortly after 11 a.m. to visit an electrical firm near Stuart Lane. Apparently, he had a heart seizure and staggered into the lane, where he collapsed.”

The article continued with a short biography of his life, which included more errors of fact.

A number of other newspapers reported his death. These included the 'Cumberland Argus', 'The Cootamundra Herald', 'Wagga Wagga's Daily Advertiser' and 'The West Wyalong Advocate', (reported headed “Death of Billy Hart ... popular ex-resident of West Wyalong”), as well as the R.A.A.F. magazine, 'Wings'.

The English aviation magazine, 'Flight', also reported in its publication dated 7 October 1943.

**28 June 1987:** 'The Sun-Herald' newspaper included an information section headed “DID Y'KNOW” in which “William Ewart Hart” was featured. The date of the publication of this particular issue was the day before the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our first international air race on 29 June 1912. Unfortunately, once again, the printed story contained errors of fact in statements such as, “... he was rejected by the Australian Flying Corps” and which “... refused to enlist him for service in World War I”. Possibly, the cartoonist, Xemsley 1987, was confused with World War II when he was deemed medically unfit by the Royal Australia Air Force.

**June 1995:** I spoke to a lady who said her mother worked for Bill Hart for many years, and she would tell her mother of my interest in him. As a result of this contact, on 13 July 1995, I received a letter from her mother, Mrs. K. Gerrard, in which she wrote what amounted to a mini testimonial in favour of Bill Hart.

What a serendipitous series of events this was.

Sadly, Mrs. Gerrard has since died, as has her daughter, but I have contacted her grandson. Mr. Brian Lusby, who has given me permission to include in this biography the contents of her letter to me, which follows:

"My daughter ... had a phone conversation with you re Bill Hart. I worked for him as secretary and assistant for eleven and half wonderful years. This will be a disjointed epistle – will scribble bits as they come to mind."

"Bill had a very bright personality, lived life and crammed heaps into living. He did not attend any church, gave generously to Salvation Army and 'sisters of the Poor' in Francis Street, City – did the Sisters dental work free. He would halve the fee for work done for poorer families. The surgeries were at 247 Elizabeth St. between Liverpool and Bathurst Sts., opposite the War Memorial. (We watched that being built). First in Saunders Chambers – a new building was erected next door and he moved in. It was and still remains (pretty sure). The Prod. Alliance Building has a pinkie marble facia."

"He owned a wheat farm at West Wyalong and other properties. As for card playing in back room at surgery - never heard of that one but maybe it was so at Wyalong when he was very young – definitely not in the City, it was a very busy practise. He was expert at removing wisdom teeth, especially impacted. Dentists from all over the place referred patients to him – he did a Post Grad. course in America and was ahead of methods here."

"Bill had the first Ford agency in Australia. Sold his first car to Bill Winn, owned Winn's Dept store, corner Oxford St. and Wentworth Ave. It was later destroyed by fire."

"He and his friends were really founders of Richmond aerodrome. They regularly played around there with planes. One friend, Edgar Percival later went to England and manufactured the 'Percival Gull' plane. He did very well."

"He gave Bert Hinkler flying lessons."

"There are films in the Canberra Film Archives. You should contact them or intend a visit. I'm sure they would run them for you."

"Bill married Clare. When Bill married, they lived in Bondi then they bought a home at Strathfield. They sold that and bought another at Cheltenham (his last). Clare's family lived in Victoria. She moved to be near them."

(Census confirms this: 1930 at 4 Ambassadors Court, Bondi Rd, Bondi: 1933 at 268 Bondi Rd. Bondi: 1936 at 5 Coopers St, Strathfield: 1943 at 11 Chorley Crescent, Cheltenham – Ed)

"Bill died on his way to work. He must have felt 'off' and sat in a laneway off Bathurst Street where he had a heart attack. He was found by someone passing."

"He was the most unforgettable character I have ever met. If only I had some journalistic skills, I could write a best seller of experiences and laughs during those years. Of my flight with 'Smithy', etc, etc."

Have good day, Kell Garrard

After receiving the above letter, I telephoned Mrs. Garrard and arranged to visit her at her home at Niagara Park, north of Gosford, N.S.W., where I spent an interesting time talking to her about Bill Hart.

She related how he loved mechanical challengers and told one story about him going down to his garage on night in his pyjamas and dressing gown and, whilst there, accidentally spilling petrol on his stomach, which he left untreated overnight. Next morning, he had blisters on his stomach.

Elsewhere in this biography, I have mentioned Bill going to Newcastle. Mrs. Garrard told me that, whilst there, he was nearly drowned and was almost given up for dead! (Same thing happened to Kingsford-Smith. I guess its trait of risk takers! -Ed)

She said that he was a funny man, enjoyed a drink, but did not play cards or swear. On some occasions when Mrs. Garrard was not available, he would 'two finger type' his letters, etc.

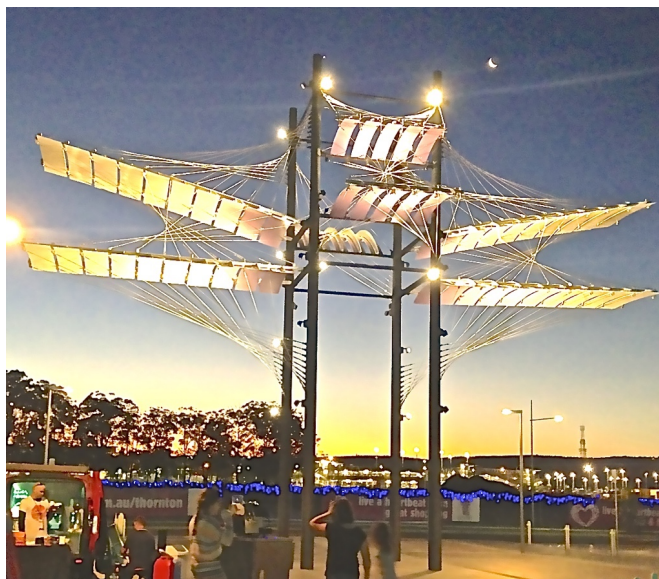
My notes of this visit finished with the comment: "**Above all, he was a gentleman!**".

\* \* \* \* \*

**Year 2011:** To commemorate the centenary of Bill's memorable flight from Penrith to Parramatta on 3 November 1911, the 'Parramatta Heritage Centre ... has a display of news clippings and photographs of Hart and his machine. The centrepiece of the display is a replica of Hart's plane, on loan from the Powerhouse Museum."

**6 December 2013:** A new sculpture at Penrith, N.S.W., was officially opened. It was dedicated to aviator William Ewart Hart. Bill used these grounds of Thornton Hall, way back in 1911. The officials at this event were: Mike Williams – Thornton Estate Development Director, Clr. Ross Fowler – Mayor of Penrith Laura Player – Descendant of Thomas and Jane Smith and Greg Edwards – a representative of the Hart Family.





*Boxkite Sculpture at Thornton Hall Estate - Dedicated to Aviator William Ewart Hart*





## **CHAPTER 21**

### **HIS DEATH AND FUNERAL SERVICE**

**19 July 1943:** Feeling unwell, Bill Hart left his surgery in Elizabeth Street, Sydney, reportedly without telling anyone. He turned into Bathurst Street, and crossed over Castlereagh and Pitt Streets. As he approached Stuart (sometimes spelt Stewart Lane, but no longer exists), he had a heart attack, collapsed at the entrance to the lane and died. Later, his body was found leaning against the wall in the entrance to the lane ... a sad end to a very productive life.

He was 58 years of age.

Tributes poured in from many sources, and at his funeral/cremation service. Wing Commander H.T. 'Bunny' Hammond (Royal Australian Air Force) placed an Air Force Association pennant on his coffin as a flight of RAAF aircraft dipped in salute as it passed overhead.

Bill was a remarkable man, respected and admired vice-president of the Australian Flying Corps and Air Force association. The Associations minutes recorded the passing of "a resourceful, courageous pioneer, soldier and airman, a loyal friend and good citizen, a loveable personality, and a gallant gentleman."

The aviation fraternity certainly was not distracted by the dark days of 1943 and paid full tribute to the memory of Bill Hart.

His initiatives and work, particularly in aviation between September 1911 and September 1912 at his bases at Belmore Park, Penrith and later at Ham Common, Richmond, helped to identify these two regions as "the cradle of powered flight" in Australia.

I think it would be appropriate that this document should finish as it started:

**William Ewart Hart – (1885 – 1945)**  
**An unfinished biography of an Australian pioneer aviator.**

**May he long be remembered as a true pioneer of Australian aviation and as a great Australian.**



## CHAPTER 22

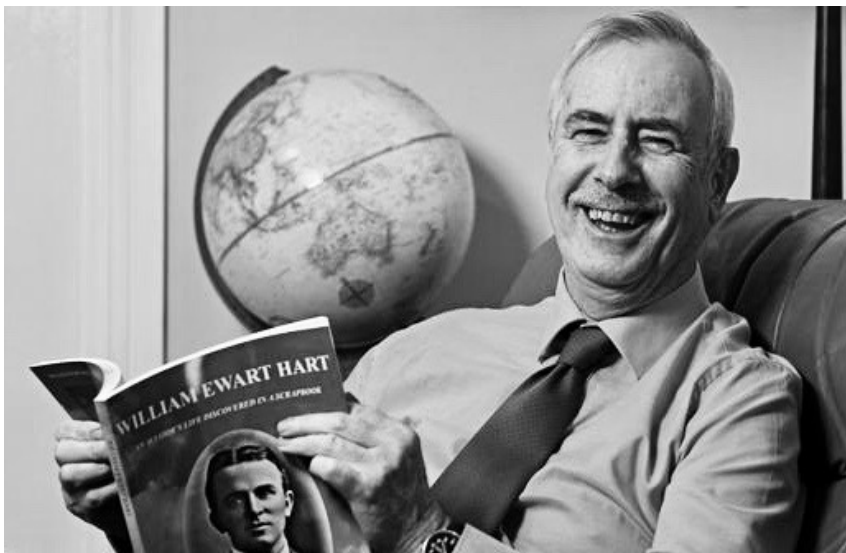
### EPILOGUE

That concludes my research into the life of William Ewart ‘Bill/y’ Hart, and consequently Part 1 of this biography. Should his personal/ business papers ever become available, I trust whoever takes up the challenge of writing Part 2 of this biography enjoys the task as I have enjoyed researching and writing Part 1: Work in Progress.

\* \* \* \* \*

EDITOR’S DESK: May I say it has been a privilege to review and edit Keith’s volume of work. A work that spans 3 decades of research. No library, museum or newspaper has not been scrutinized by him, resulting in countless hours, so that we all can get a clearer image of his chosen subject.

A short story – to tell the lengths in which Keith went to investigate Bill Hart’s life. It came to light when I went to West Wyalong, Bill’s home for 5 years. Now, Wikipedia says that “West Wyalong is the main town of the Bland Shire in the Riverina region of New South Wales, Australia. Located 467 kilometres west of Sydney and 262 m above sea level, it is situated on the crossroads of the Newell Highway between Melbourne and Brisbane, and the Mid-Western Highway between Sydney and Adelaide.” It is a shade under 6 hour’s drive from Sydney. I asked at the local Museum if they had any information on a former resident, Bill. Out came a file inside a bulging manilla folder. It had a few photos and articles. More importantly, it a letter written by Keith White, dated 1990, requesting any information on our joint quest. As I said previously, Keith sure did contact everyone, whether by letter, phone or in person.



*Editor/Author Greg Edwards*

Greg was born in Sydney, Australia. He was educated in the NSW Public School system beginning at Burwood Central then Fort Street Boys High., In 1973, attained a Dip. Tech. (Sydney teachers College). In 1989, Grad. Dip in Educational Studies (Computer Education), then in 2006 a Dip. Horticulture (Ryde TAFE). He is now retired after 35 years of teaching. [Email: [edwards\\_greg@hotmail.com](mailto:edwards_greg@hotmail.com)]

Okay Keith – I will take up the challenge of writing Part 2. The Billy Hart Story is a gift that keeps on giving. I will add bonus chapters. Remember, just like in the recent past, you could buy a vinyl record / CD and often there were bonus tracks. (That may be difficult today as streaming will allow us now to just buy individual tracks.) I have uncovered more information from Bristol Archives, U.K., that gives us a greater appreciation of Leslie Falconer MacDonald who trained Billy Hart to fly. In my way of thinking, if aviator MacDonald wasn't around way back in 1911, then there wouldn't have been an aviator Hart.



## **CHAPTER 23**

### **BONUS – HILLS AND MACDONALD**

Aviator J.J. Hammond and Aviator / Engineer L.F. MacDonald both flew No.10 Bristol Boxkite Biplane that was on offer to the Australian Military. (This was the biplane that Bill Hart eventually bought.) Hammond was a bit choosy on who flew as a passenger with him. MacDonald, maybe because he was a 20-year youngster, was more amenable in taking passengers up.

G.A. Hills was a photographer for Evening News and for Town & Country Journal. He was lucky enough to go up as a passenger with Aviator MacDonald in early May 1911. Below is the whole experience explained by Hills. For being a photographer, he sure makes a pretty fine reporter as well. While Hills was “up in the air”, he found it difficult to gauge the passing of time. So, Mr. G.A. Hills was able to time the flight by the number of rolls of film he used.

### **UP IN THE AIR.**

(Up in the Air - Hills & MacDonald - 8 May 1911 - Evening News p3, p7.)

#### **FLIGHT OVER EASTERN SUBURBS.**

"EVENING NEWS" SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE.

PIERCES THE CLOUDS FOR PICTURES. MAGNIFICENT MORNING SPECTACLE.

HOW IT FEELS TO FLY THROUGH THE MORNING MISTS. BY G. A. HILLS.

It has always been the ambition of photographers to picture Sydney from above, and at last that ambition has been realised. A long-standing application to go up with Mr. Hammond and take a camera had met with polite but firm refusal. Mr. Hammond not caring for the risk of taking any moveable furniture in the shape of cameras up aloft with him, but with the advent of Mr. MacDonald a new situation was created, and a fresh application meeting with success it only remained to fix a day for the flight, and Monday was chosen for preference on account of the probability of a clearer atmosphere, from Sunday's rest from the smoke of a huge city. My first Impressions of Mr. MacDonald were quite reassuring, for, though he is young - very young - he thoroughly understands every part of the machine, and after seeing him fly in the gusty, choppy wind on Saturday afternoon, one is convinced of his skill as an aviator, and also of his pluck as a man. So, as the crowd gradually disperses, and he is left a little to himself, I have a few words with him about the approaching flight. On the question of appropriate dress, he deprecatingly spreads his hands, and says, with a little smile, "Well, you see how I went up" and as he went up in his ordinary wearing clothes, I decided to do the same.

## **ARRANGING THE ROUTE.**

"And now as to route Mr. MacDonald?" "That depends a good deal on the wind and other conditions, but if everything is favourable, I'll go where you want to go." "Over the city?" "I don't think so. The regulations are a bit against that, and there is a good deal of risk."

"In what way?"

"Well for instance, if the engine happened to stop, the middle of George Street (This is the main street of Sydney. It goes from Circular Quay all the way to Central Railway Station - Greg) is not the most ideal spot in the world to land in. Fancy, if the wind was behind you, coming down at a swoop, and careering along the street at seventy or eight miles an hour."

I suggested it would be exciting, anyhow.

Mr. MacDonald agreed, but thought excitement of a milder form, and under other circumstances would be preferable. I did not argue the point.

"You mentioned," said I, "something about your engine stopping?"

"There is a popular impression that if it did you would come down quicker than you went up, as the saying is." "We certainly should come down very quickly" replied the aviator, but not in the way you mean. If the engine stops, or if I shut it off, at an elevation of several thousand feet, there is enough way on the machine to glide down for a distance of a mile and a half or two miles.

"And now, about a camera?"

"A roll film one is necessary, as it is very inadvisable, in fact, I would say inadmissible, to take up plates in loose slides."

"And the reason?"

"Several—one is that a gratuitous gift of a photographic slide with two glass plates in it to the top of an in-offending citizens' head, is not likely to be appreciated, and might lead to consequences, and another and more important reason (to us) is that should anything of that description get into the propellor when going at the rate it revolves, well, I shouldn't like to attempt to describe what would happen."

I decided not to take any plates up.

"Why," said Mr. MacDonald, warming up to the subject, "a penknife might wreck an aeroplane, and I wouldn't trust a sixpenny bit, if it got into some of the workings." "So, if I ever have a yearning to see the effect of a penknife or a sixpenny bit, sucked in by centrifugal force to the inner workings of an aeroplane propeller, it would be not at an altitude of thousands of feet."

"Any other directions, Mr. MacDonald?"

"Not that I can think of at the present time, but when you are up taking photographs and get something which you think especially good, don't thump me on the back."

I promised not to. "Because," said Mr. MacDonald, "It's happened to me before. Good night. I'll see you on Monday."

## **IN THE MORNING.**

An anxious look at the sky early on Monday morning showed a slight wind, with the smoke travelling away to the south at about five or six miles an hour, but this gentle breeze had slowed down by 8 o'clock, and conditions from an aviating aspect were almost ideal, though looked at with a photographic eye, it was a trifle cloudy, though not sufficiently so to prevent the keenest anticipation of a successful mission. In this calculation, however, we were somewhat at fault, for on arrival at Ascot at 8.30 we found that although the ground and immediate surroundings were fairly clear, the distance was quite hazy. However, the conditions for flying are so ideal that the opportunity to go up is not to be missed, and at the appointed time the great engine bird is wheeled out, and Mr. MacDonald cheerfully says. "Now, if you're ready, I'll get you to mount" and having done so, and Mr. MacDonald having also taken his position in front, a few directions from Mr. Smith, the manager of the British Aeroplane Company as to the necessity when taking pictures of not interfering with the aviator, are carefully noted, and all is ready for a start.

"LET GO!"

And now the propeller whirled, several pairs of sturdy arms held our beautiful conveyance until its captain should give the word, like the skipper of the old-time merchantman, with his hands to his lips in the form of a speaking trumpet, shouting, "Let go the tow rope," and our serial craft like her prototype of the deep, with canvas wings and wire track stays, and steering gear abaft, is free to roam at will in the clement of the air. A look to the right of the machine, a careful glance to the left, a searching inspection of the elevating planes, a moment to listen to the tale of the engine - for it speaks to our aviator as one who knows its every mood— and everything being ready a hand is raised in signal, restraining hands are removed – and the engine seems to give an extra snort expressive of delight at being free, and, lo! We are off on our voyage.

At first like a great canvas-winged bicycle. We speed along the ground. and then - but first let me pause a moment to tell of the peculiar feeling experienced up to that point, from the time of climb to the little cramped position by courtesy called a seat, which you occupy behind the aviator; the slight interval of time in which you settle yourself as circumstances will allow, the last look around for the time being of friends and spectators, the unusual position you find yourself in of being photographed instead of photographing others, the starting of the engine, another interval of time which seems quite an age before the word is given to let go, all occasioning a tenseness of concentration and a tightening of muscle which is quite indescribable and must be actually gone through to be experienced – and then the moment arrives when this tenseness gives way, muscles relax, a delightfully happy feeling.





**MR. HILLS AND MR. MACDONALD.**

They made a successful flight this morning.

**“It pervades every sense of your being. You have left the ground and are really flying.”**

**GLORIOUS EXHILARATION.**

Oh, this exhilaration is glorious. No element of fear intrudes one becomes a child again, with all a child's pleasure and joy in something entirely new, laughing for very gladness as the breezes of the upper air rush caressingly by swifter and swifter yet; higher still higher; smaller and smaller grow familiar faces of friends, who a few short seconds ago were nodding farewell and wishing a pleasant trip just for all the world as if one were going to the parts of the earth. It all seems so strange. Riding on a voyage and

no one to come round to collect your railway ticket, no one to gruffly bombard you with "Show tickets" or "Fares please," though the thought crowds the mind if one could only own a concern where passengers fares were on the same scale as the usual aeroplane fare what fortunes it would mean.

We are over the waters of Botany Bay now, and I am interested in the well described reflection, of being able to see that apparently shallow drop of water, which seems a co-tangential experience with one which I have had at the bottom of a deep mine, at looking up and seeing the stars shining in the daytime. We find from our altitude of a thousand feet that the haze and smoke conditions have become intensified rendering the possibility of good photographs rather remote. In fact, we seem to be continually in the centre of a little clear patch with a dark curtain of haze all around us. So pronounced is this, that it is very difficult to know in what direction we are going, though we seem to be heading out to sea, though, what with the combined difficulties of the haze and the unique experience of being above the ground instead of on it. I had not the remotest idea for some time after we left the waters of Botany Bay what particular suburb, we were over. After flying for some time little time towards the coast, we turned to the left again.



*Flying over the Suburbs of Sydney*

## **THE FLIGHT OF TIME**

And then it occurred to me to think how long we had been up in the air how long since we had left the stable terra firma for the unstable atmosphere, the home of the lightnings, the trackless paths of the wireless and highways of the hawk and eagle, sacred no more from the ingenuity of man's marvellous invention and daring, and I found that we had been up just two films. From an aerial photographer's point of view watches and clocks had lost interest, the duration of my flight was centred in the number of exposures I was able to make and I was limited by inexorable manager and aviator to the number of films my camera would take, and I had six of them – six precious films, worth many times their weight in gold and two of them gone. As a golfer would say, I was two up and four to go. So, there must be no reckless exposing of films, they must be husbanded with the knowledge that there is no reserve to fall back on after the active supply is exhausted.

From a photographer's point of view, it is quite unusual. There is no possibility of getting too much sky. Your picture is all picture, and foreground troubles you not. There are no obtruding branches of trees which you often consign to a region where wood does not last long, no cheeky little boy runs across the line of your focus of your camera with a "Take my photo, mister," the trammels of the crowd are not in fact photographing with a sky man is "dead easy" from a technical standpoint. The modius operandi consists of pointing the camera downwards as near as you can get it and letting the shutter go, being particularly careful at the same time, for the sake of any wandering pedestrian below, that you do not let the camera go. It seems natural that in a region which is part of the infinity of space, you should set your lens for "Infinity," though it may sound paradoxical that whilst you are stopping up there you should also be careful to stop down.

## **GETTING USED TO IT.**

By this time, I have become a little accustomed to my novel surroundings and have time to take notice of the country below.

A residence which would be described on an auctioneer's catalogue as a beautiful house, with spacious grounds, from dizzy heights of the sky plane, can be covered with the palm of your hand. Main roads become winding tracks, lightly or darkly threading their way over the apparently flat surface of the earth below you; sheltered avenues have retired into obscurity or are represented by what you know intuitively to be dark clumps of trees. You view a well-boomed estate which is being cut up, and which the advertisement says will provide for a good-sized township and you vow to yourself that it seems as if a good hop and jump would land you from one side to the other without much exertion.

That is when we are at our highest elevation. When the elevating plane is deflected, and we come down low I become intensely interested in the people who are stopping their carts, to look upwards at us, mothers with babies in their arms and little children run, all waving us a friendly greeting as we sail over them in the sky. I notice distinctly as we pass over one little garden where some children are looking up with their mother, and their granny, all of them except the old lady, with something white in their hands, to

wave at us that she must not be outdone by the others, picks up a long clothes prop and shakes it approvingly towards us.

The personal element seems to be prominent, and every cart on the highway, every pedestrian, every little group that rushes out to view the unusual sight, create a kindly feeling in your breast, and you feel constrained to wave to them your appreciation of their patronage, as an audience. For you feel that for once in your life you are a star performer.

You can pretty well gauge the effect of your appearance in the sky has on your fellow citizens, but it is curious to watch the effect on animals. Portions of a large collection of draught horses at a place I took to be Moore Park seemed quite fascinated when we came above them, their heads being elevated to the sky in quite an unusual fashion those with white faces showing out very prominently as they gazed quietly up at us, then while another section of them, not so sure that all was well, galloped at racing speed till we had passed. At another place as we passed over, a violent commotion below gained new attention and I found we were passing over a duck farm the denizens of which betrayed the greatest agitation.

That is the perspective in front as you look to the right or the left, or over the head of the aviator, or lean over and take a downward peep to the earth a thousand feet below you. And what does it look like behind? The propellor with its six cylinders attached is whirling at the rate of 1200 revolutions a minute. The engine – which is the main consideration in an aeroplane, nor should it refuse duty and go on strike at a place where the aviator could not land in safety disaster would surely follow – is throbbing away in great style leaving no track if we have large splashes of oil which it throws to the right and left on the canvas of the machine.

Strangely enough I found it much more difficult to form any accurate opinion of the country behind than when I was looking ahead. That great propellor roaring its revolutionary way through the air seems to monopolise one's attention altogether. It seemed determined to demonstrate the absolute fact that it was the dominating factor in the whole situation and that should it cease from roaring we should probably soon be where the weary are at rest. I had an intense desire during the whole flight to break the rule of the deep and talk to "the man at the wheel" but although I could hear him pretty plainly, I know it was much more difficult for him to hear me as my voice was carried in the rear and drowned in the propellor's gigantic voice.

At this time the haze was so thick that we got bushed. A slight backwards jerk of Mr. Macdonald's hand indicating that he wished to speak to me and leaning over I heard him say "Where are we?" and at the risk of breaking my throat I called back, "I haven't the faintest idea." "He laughed and said, "No more have I".

### **UP IN THE AIR. THIS MORNING'S FINE FLIGHT. HOW THE RETURN WAS MADE. - BY G. A. HILLS.**

We now passed over an apparently abnormal number of racecourses, one of which I was able to locate as Kensington, and informed Mr. MacDonald of the fact. Having now got my bearings, I asked him to steer to the right, as I particularly wanted to get to the Macquarie Lighthouse, and also to skirt the coast over Bondi and along to the heads, for,

by this time it was much clearer and brighter to the north east than at any previous period of our flight.

So, we turned a bit to the right over the northern part of Kensington Golf Links and flying at a good elevation above the Club House, it seemed that we would soon be at the heads.

However, Mr. Macdonald decided at this juncture that it would be well to turn home owing to the thick conditions, and the difficulty of landing in the midst of houses, should there be a necessity for so doing. It is with the utmost reluctance that I viewed this decision for photographic conditions were vastly improving and the sight of the Sydney Heads from an aeroplane, even on a rather hazy day, is a sight. It is disappointing to lose. However, bearing in mind that well-known saying, "Don't argue." I forbore, for, up in an aeroplane one realises to its greatest intensity, the danger occurred in flying over a city or suburb, and the necessity when aviation becomes more general of suitable landing places for flying machines.

We had now been at four films as Mr. MacDonald inclined our sky plane to the left over the beautiful lakes and drives of Centennial Park and it was then the fact was particularly forced upon me how slow we seemed to be going. I knew that it was not really a fact, the engine, during the whole of the flight, was continually roaring at me that it was revolving at the rate 1200 times a minute, and that we were speeding through the air at 45 miles an hour, and I knew better than to disbelieve that engine; but on the same principle that a fast steamer when off the land seems hardly to be moving by persons on shore, so, had I not the evidence previously mentioned, I could have been sure that from 15 to 20 miles an hour was our limit.

Aviation is in its infancy, so was the motor car 10 or 12 years ago, and yet we have the ubiquitous policeman always ready for the motor man who exceeds the speed limit. (Somethings don't change – Ed) I am wondering what standard the aerial bobby of the future who lays await up aloft on the watch for the incautious aviator who exceeds the speed limit will have to go by.

We have by this time we crossed the park and are hovering over the old familiar location of the Agricultural Society and the Sydney Cricket Ground, looking very different to the view we used to, and now to the left arose Moore Park.

We came home through the haze that we encountered on the way out. Mr. MacDonald evidently knew his direction this time, but I must say that in this return to the haze and smoke I got bushed again, though I know we passed a large school where the whole of the children, dear little dots, they seemed to be assembled in the school ground and greeted us with frantic waving of their arms and I am sure they cheered too as I with others would have cheered myself hoarse at such a thrilling sight of Mr. Hammond and Mr. Coles on Friday last, in their flight over the school. Their cheering was swallowed up by the insistent noise of the propellor.

After we leave the school, I have a dim recollection of having seen what looks like a green chess board but is in reality a Chinaman's garden which looms out down below from the smoky atmosphere. But probably it was a near relation as we did not come that way at the start of our trip and whilst I am wondering exactly where our position is, I

find Mr. MacDonald has piloted us straight back to Ascot and a moment or two later we are swooping down at what seems to be at a super pace.

In fact, it seems treble the pace attained at any previous part of the journey and have made a safe descent after having been up six films or in earthly vernacular, thirty minutes.

## **VIEWED FROM BOTANY.**

### **MANOEUVERING OVER THE BAY**

Early in the morning, Botany was clothed in a heavy haze, rendering all the more impenetrable by the thick smoke from the boiling down and other establishments curling its way upwards. The waters of the bay were as calm as the proverbial mill pond. There was not even a zephyr to disturb the calm of its breast. Towards 9 o'clock the haze lifted, the clouds of smoke from the countless chimney stacks had practically died away and there was revealed a blue sky flocked here and there with clouds like snowy fleece.

### **ON THE ALERT**

For an hour before the flight, the residents were on alert. False alarm after false alarm was sounded. But it was only the whirr of the motors of the tiny launches flitting over the hazy waters of the bay. Shortly after the local school bell had signalled, there was a loud whirring of a motor.

"By golly," remarked an aboriginal from the boiling down works. And then the attention of every Tom, Dick and Harry in the establishment turned in the direction in which he pointed.

But they could see nothing. In a few moments, however, a tiny speck appeared, and the whirring became more pronounced.

Nearer and nearer approached the speck until gradually it evolved itself into the aeroplane. Gracefully as a bird it glided on towards the Botany Pier at a height of about 300 ft to 400 ft. Both aviator Mr. MacDonald and the Evening News photographer, Mr. Hills, being plainly relaxed and looking as comfortable as if they were in their own homes enjoying a pleasant pipe.

The beaches of the bay were crowded with seagulls enjoying their breakfast from the delicacies washed in by the tide. As the machine approached there was a stampede among them, and they scattered frantically in all directions, like the horses of a few years ago resenting the introduction of the motor car in the streets the birds of the sea now look with awe and wonder and are probably jealousy at the air motor now trespassing on their hitherto sacred domain.





*Aviator L.F. MacDonald flying over Ascot Racecourse - May 1911*

## **MANOEUVRED OVER THE BAY**

The daring aviators manoeuvred over the bay, and then, turning like a graceful dove, headed shorewards, and were soon lost in sight in the direction of Ascot.

About ten minutes later however the whirring motor was again heard and shortly after the machine again made its appearance headed baywards. It approached by the pier and then wheeling round, faced eastwards, and skirted along the beach at a height of several hundred feet. It was truly a magnificent sight (Oh! Those magnificent men. Play theme music here - Ed) as the machine vied with the flying birds in the gracefulness of its movements. Handkerchiefs and hats were waved by the admiring spectators, and the machine glided over towards La Perouse, the aborigines at the station became almost wild with excitement at its approach. They were, however, doomed in a little disappointment.

Before reaching the station, the machine was swung gracefully and pointed towards the coast in the direction of Randwick. Gradually the outline became less distinct, the whirring of the motor less pronounced, until finally the aeroplane became a mere speck in the sky and was ultimately lost to sight in its flight towards the city."



Please note:

Transcribing, the above article, was a difficult task as the newspaper print was often indistinct. Some words were substituted; however, meaning was not lost. This was in an age where the inhabitants of Australia were identified as British.

Local Government decisions had to be often passed by the relevant departmental office back in London. Also, being politically correct, in those days, was not high on anyone's agenda.



## CHAPTER 24

### BONUS – HAMMOND AND HARGRAVE

# The God in the Machine

(Deus ex machina-Latin: – A term used where a crane ([mechane](#)) are employed by gods to solve problems in a Greek play -Ed)

The following is an interesting transcript from the Sun newspaper (*The Sun* -p1- 11 May 1911). We have Mr. J.J. Hammond interviewing Mr. L. Hargrave. This is a unique situation. I don't know of any other interview of Lawrence Hargrave.

It is given that Bill Hart could have easily had access to Hargrave in his workshop as well. After all both Hart and Hargrave were in the same Aerial League Club.

Hammond called on Hargrave, the 61-year- old inventor, at his Woollahra Point, Wunulla Road home to interview him. This was all organised by the *Sun* newspaper.

## AVIATOR HAMMOND INTERVIEWS MR. HARGRAVE

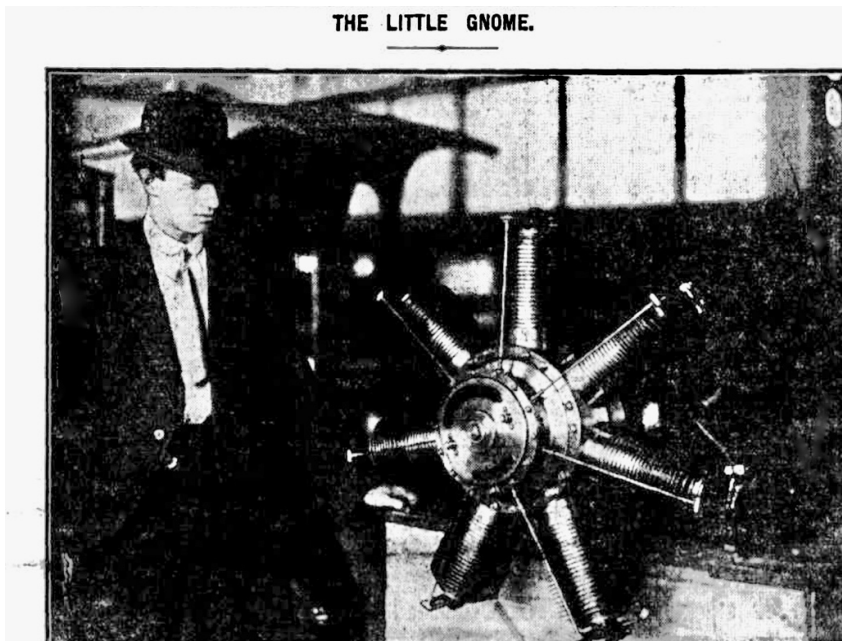
### THE MAN WHO THOUGHT OF THE GNOME

#### PERFECTING AIR TRAVEL

“Mr. Lawrence Hargrave, of Woollahra Point, is one of the most disappointed man in Sydney today. For many years he has been one of the world's experts in matters that appertain to the conquest of the air. He is an inventor whose skill has been perfected by a lifetime's loving thought and strenuous work of brain and hand. Ever since he was old enough to put his ideas into form he has had before him one great ideal – the perfecting of a heavier than air machine. He has transformed innumerable theories into fact, his scientific papers have been read before most of the learned bodies of the world, and the records of the Royal Society of New South Wales alone contain many a deep, cleverly reasoned recorded of what Mr. Hargrave has done in the science that is even now only coming to fruition. It is not too much to say that he has given his whole life to the dreary, tiresome, dry battle against the air. Collated in the books that he keeps so carefully in his workshop at Woollahra Point, he has notes and photographs that represent many years of strenuous toil, notes that tell of the gradual moving forward of the practice of flying, photographs that show you the evolution of the wonderful machines of today. All this Mr. Hargrave has done without fee and without reward. His heart has been in the air, so to speak, and although successive Governments here might, with great results, have taken advantage of Mr. Hargrave's brains – to Australia's advantage as well as to Mr. Hargraves – nothing has been done. England and America recognise in him a genius who has done much towards winning the battle of the air. In his homeland he has met with scant recognition.



*J.J. Hammond and Engineer (L.F. MacDonald) at Sydney's Ascot Racecourse  
(Sydney Mail & NSW Advertiser - p24 - 26 April 1911)*



*A picture of the famous Gnome. engine, which is most of the air machines in the world. It is the motive power of the Bristol biplane flown by Mr. Hammond and it originated in the mind of Mr. Lawrence Hargrave, a Sydney man.  
(The Sun - p1 - 11 May 1911)*

## **MISSED THE FLIGHT**

These are some of the reasons why Mr. Hargrave is a disappointed man today. But there is another matter that has filled his cup of disappointment to the brim and running over. Mr. J.J. Hammond, the intrepid pilot who has been delighting Sydney audiences with his flights in the Bristol biplane has sailed right over Mr. Hargrave house. He did this on the day when he made his memorable flight to the Heads and back over Sydney city. Mr. Hargrave was working hard on his models at the time, and he did not hear the whirr and buzz of the engine. He did not see the aeroplane - the machine that is practically the baby born of his theories.

The only tinge of pleasure that he has to counteract his disappointment is that his boy is following in the footsteps in the realm of air-conquest, and that yesterday Mr. Hargrave himself had the privilege of a chat with Mr. Hammond. It was a meeting of the theorist and inventor with the practical man – the father and the son of aeroplaning.

(Sadly, I must relate that, his only son Geoffrey was killed in action at Gallipoli in May 1915. Lawrence followed thereafter in July 1915 - Ed)

Mr Hammond went out to Woollahra Point to interview Mr. Hargrave on behalf of “The Sun” and below will be found the story that results.

## **THE FATHER OF THE AEROPLANE**

### **WHAT MR. HARGRAVE HAS DONE**

### **MAKING FLIGHT POSSIBLE**

### **INTERVIEW WITH THE INVENTOR**

**(Written for “The Sun” by Pilot Aviator J.J. Hammond.)**

Although, I am an Australasian born and bred, with a heartfelt pride for my own country, New Zealand, and a better knowledge of it, perhaps, than any other country in the world. I have never met Mr. Lawrence Hargrave until yesterday. I have heard of him many a time. I had read of him, and I had read his works, and I had heard other people high up in the service of the air talk in praise of the man in Australia who for years had fought the air, who had made, to a great extent, out of the possibilities of years ago, the successes of the present and the certainties of the future. Therefore, when “The Sun” asked me to interview Mr. Hargrave on its behalf I gladly acquiesced, though the job was a strange one for me.

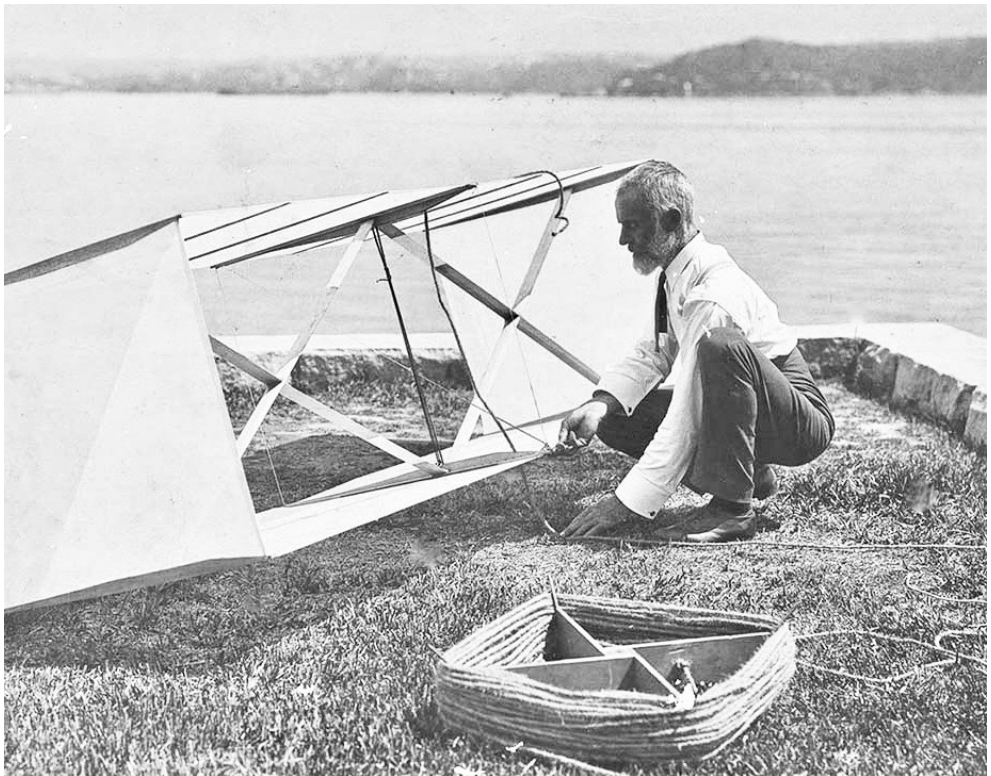
But I found him amid surroundings that were only second best to the interview that I would have liked. Seated in my seat in my aeroplane, with Mr. Hargrave behind me as a passenger, would have been the most suitable method. But I found him surrounded by the paraphernalia of his craft, models of aeroplanes and engines, and it looked to me for all the world like a little replica of an aeroplane construction factory.

## **PRAISE FOR THE INVENTOR**

May I say at once that the world of flying is greatly indebted to him for what he has done in the science. And, from what he said to me, he will go on doing what he can to improve the machines that men go up in today, often at the risk of their lives. Mr. Hargrave has the eyes of the genius, the mannerisms of a man who thinks profoundly, and of one who, if he had had the resources at his disposal, would have made a greater name for himself in the arena of practical flying even than he has made in the underworld, if I may call it so, of theory.

We talked of make things that would be uninteresting to the newspaper reader, technical talk of V motors and rotaries, bench tests, pulling power, and lifting power, and of this I am convinced - that Australia would have been the first in the field with heavier than air machines if Mr. Hargrave had had his due.

Without him neither the biplane nor the monoplane would probably have come into existence. For his box-kites – the same as were used in the South African War – were the germ of the principle of the modern flying machine. And the devices that he shows in the models that I saw during my talk with him, have many improvements that must go into the aeroplane as we know it now. Mr Hargrave says that other men's ideas have helped him. Modestly, he says little of how his ideas have helped other men.



*Lawrence Hargrave at Point Piper c. 1910 (NMA)*



## **A SAFETY AEROPLANE**

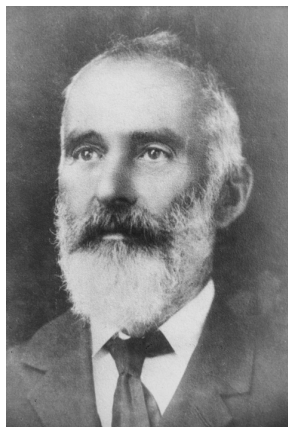
He has nearly perfected an aeroplane which will make aviation as safe as sitting in a deckchair on your verandah. It will be self-adjusting and will not capsize. These safeguards are what we have all been waiting for. Even with the Gnome engine, the best on the market today, there is a certain tendency to gyroscopic action, which makes it more difficult to turn in one direction than the other, and which adds to the danger of the machine turning turtle and dropping like a flash through space. One of his devices is the forming of the upper and lower sides of the planes in the shape of a flat S, and another is the attachment of the wings of the aeroplane – the box-kite, with its double cells to the machine by a flexible rope. With our present machines, the attachment between the planes and the body – the part where the pilot sits in front or behind the engine – is rigid; but with Mr. Hargrave's idea it will not matter how hard the wind may be blowing, or how the machine may be twisted and turned, the body will remain level and safe. As he says, the pilot may be asleep in his seat even. That would make no difference, so long as the engine kept going.

## **DOING AWAY WITH DANGER**

Then he would do away, also, with a number of - nearly all - of the wires and stays that at present hamper the aviator in the event of an accident, and I think that if he brings his machine into practical use there should be no repetition of some of the tragedies of which we have read.

Then there is then engine question. There can be no doubt it that Mr. Hargrave was the father of the little Gnome. It was his idea before anybody else thought of it. But other people had the money, and they perfected it. Mr. Hargrave showed a photograph of one of his engine models, taken years and years ago, and I said, "That is the Gnome." "Yes," he replied quietly. "It should have been the Hargrave." And it should.

But in the many other things that money has made possible, Mr. Hargrave gave of his brain and thought, and took none of the material profits. He has really and truly been "the god of the machine."



*Mr. L. Hargrave b.1850 d.1915 (NMA)*

## **ONLY A JOCKEY**

He holds another theory, and that is that until the makers of aeroplane engines can get a motor that will run at a slower speed than those of today, and still do the same work, there will always be danger in the air. I agree with him entirely, and I believe that before a year is out our present engines will be scrapped for just such an invention as he has in his brilliant mind.

In conclusion, I should like to say how extremely pleased I was to meet Mr. Hargrave. It was quite an education even to see his workshop and his beautiful models - for they are all beautifully and wonderfully made considering the disadvantage under which he works.

I was convinced of the smallness of the mere man who flies while he was talking to me. He said one thing that made me think. We were discussing the inner ethics of aeroplaning, and he remarked to me in a kindly smiling manner. "You are only the jockey of the aeroplane, you know."

**I admitted it. All of us who fly are the jockeys. It is such men as Mr. Hargrave who have made our horses!"**



## CHAPTER 25

### BONUS – THE SHORT LIFE OF A PROFESSIONAL AVIATOR, LESLIE MACDONALD.

The first-time that the media mentioned Mr. L.F. MacDonald was in the article below, in FLIGHT magazine. It was Friday 11 November 1910 when MacDonald rolled out the Boxkite from a shed and did some test flights. He was getting ready for a big Saturday demonstration of his company's machines. French aviators were to take charge of these flying machines. MacDonald couldn't stay for the big show as he had to travel to Brooklands to go for his aviator's licence. Yes, on the following Tuesday, 15 November 1910, Leslie MacDonald received his No. 28 Royal Aero Club Aviator's Certificate.

(It has been decided to spell "MacDonald" in this way, where possible, as this is how he had signed his name - Ed)

## BRITISH NOTES

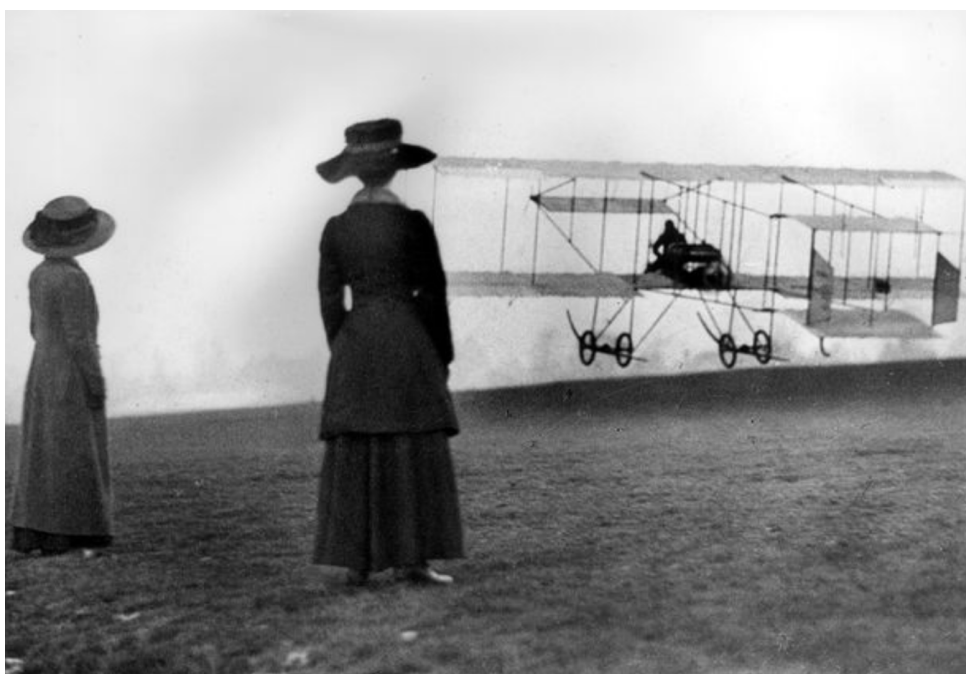
### Flying at Bristol.

STARTING on Friday afternoon of last week a fine series of flights were carried out at Bristol by the machines built by the British and Colonial Aeroplane Co. On Friday evening, although a heavy rain was falling, Mr. Macdonald brought out one of the machines from the shed which has been erected on the Sea-walls Plateau at Durdham Downs and made three short flights in a straight line, the last one accompanied by a passenger. M. Jullerot then took charge of the machine and flew round the ground for a few minutes, after which the machine, having proved itself satisfactory, was returned to its shed for the night. Operations were commenced early on Saturday morning, when M. Jullerot set the ball rolling by taking Mr. Stanley White for a ten minute trip. The wind then freshened considerably, and it was decided to postpone further attempts until the afternoon. During the morning a large crowd of people wended their way out to the grounds to see the flying, and those who remained were not disappointed. At 3 o'clock Tetard took his seat on the machine, and as soon as the police had cleared a course for him started off. He steered for the sea walls and then took a wide sweep round the grounds in the direction of the reservoir. He afterwards started on another wide circle, after which he came to earth quite successfully. During the latter part of this flight it was evident that the wind was very trying, and he found it difficult to pass over the Avon Gorge. After this flight the weather conditions became worse, and it was eventually decided to abandon any further attempts for the day. Monday was a blank day on account of the wind; several distinguished visitors, however, inspected the machines in their sheds, including Mr. Birrell, the Secretary for Ireland. It had been hoped, too, that Mr. Haldane would have been able to see the machine flying, but he was detained by his other engagements.



*Tetard's First Flight from Clifton Downs November 1910*

*Bristol Biplane over Avon George - (Vaughan Collection)*



*Frenchman Maurice Tetard - on the Downs Nov 1910 – (Aerospace Bristol)*

**BRISTOL BOXKITE DEMONSTRATION AT DURDHAM DOWN IN BRISTOL** - On Saturday, 12 November 1910, the British & Colonial Aeroplane Company (later known as the Bristol Aeroplane Company) arranged for two well-known French pilots, Maurice Tétard and Henri Jullerot, to give a public demonstration of the new Bristol 'Boxkite' on Durdham Down in Bristol. A tent hanger was erected on the Downs and Tétard flew Stanley White, one of the company directors, as passenger. The machines used were Nos.12A and 14 in the production run (there being no No.13 for superstitious reasons).

**M. TETARD DESCRIBES HIS FLIGHT** - After his fine flight, M. Tetard was interviewed by a 'Times and Mirror' reporter. He does not speak English, but in voluble French, accompanied by many gestures, he expressed his delight at the behaviour of the Bristol biplane.

It was, he said, the first time he had been up in a machine of that make, and it was certainly the best he had ever flown in. The flight was exceptionally difficult because of the tricky wind prevailing.

On the ground the wind was not particularly heavy, though gusty, but in the upper air he struck many whirlwinds coming from the Avon Gorge. The effect by the gully was to suck him downwards, and this prevented him from attaining any great elevation.

To plane upwards it is necessary to fly against the wind but going towards the Gully he met with a counter current that prevented the machine rising, and directly he turned he had the wind behind him, the effect of this being to depress the line of flight. Indeed, on the Blackley Hill side of the Downs he was a sometimes within eight feet of some lofty elms. On turning again by the Red Lamp, he met the wind broadside on, and it was this which caused the biplane to rock as it did. In no other machine, he said, would he have accomplished what he did.



*Postcard for parents. He will be flying a Bristol Boxkite Biplane in Australia. – (Item 22 - Bristol Archive, UK.)*





*(L.F. MacDonald in Conservatory / Smoking room  
(Item 28 - Bristol Archives, UK.)*

#### **AN OLD CATHEDRALIAN**

“Mr. Leslie MacDonald, who was about 25 (sic) years of age (correct age 22 years – Ed), was educated at the Bristol Cathedral School, and on leaving made a study of engineering. He was first engaged at the Bristol Wagon Works, but later joined the staff of the Bristol Tramways and Carriage Company’s motor department. When the British and Colonial Aeroplane Company was formed, he entered that business, and early qualified for the Royal Aero Club’s pilot’s certificate. At the time of the flying demonstrations on the Downs, about eighteen months ago, he made several very fine flights, once or twice taking up passengers. He also did good work at Almondsbury Hill, his splendid circular flights over the neighbouring villages causing a great amount of interest to the town and rural folk, who assembled in large numbers to watch the exhibitions.

When the Colonial flying mission was formed Mr. MacDonald, who was then a thoroughly experienced aviator, was chosen to go with Mr. Hammond to Australia. There he did much good flying and contributed large numbers to watch the exhibitions.

On his return home the war between Turkey and Italy had just broken out, and Mr. MacDonald contemplated trying military aeroplane work for one of the belligerents. Before any arrangements could be made, however, the trouble in the Balkans began to brew, and he turned his attention to this new field. But although keen, Mr. MacDonald did not come to terms, and returned home once again to give demonstrations of his masterly experience of aeronautics.

He was known in Bishopston and Redland, and generally recognised as being a most skilful and daring aviator.”

*Bristol Times -14 Jan 1913 - (Item 42 - Bristol Archives, UK.)*

A job came up for Macdonald, who held Royal Aero Club Licence No. 28, to go to Australia in December 1910 as part of the British and Colonial Aeroplane Company in its bold attempt to sell the Bristol Boxkite Biplane to the Australian Military. The sales mission was led by New Zealander, J.J. Hammond, who had attained Royal Aero Club Licence No.32. Hammond and MacDonald arrived in Perth with two Boxkites (Nos. 10 & 11). Hammond was chief pilot, and MacDonald was Pilot / Engineer. Their mechanic was Frank Coles. Joe Hammond made the first ever powered flight at the Belmont Park Racecourse in Western Australia on 3 January 1911. They moved on to Adelaide and Melbourne. Finally, they went to Sydney and Liverpool. (Liverpool is an outlying suburb of Sydney). They broke all sorts of records for cross-country flights. While Hammond took his English wife off to see his family in NZ during May 1911, Leslie MacDonald took up flying around Sydney, with passengers, for several more months. The sales tour had come to an end and it was a matter for the military to make up their mind.



This is when dentist William Hart saw an opportunity in buying the Bristol Biplane. The plane had done its job and would only be an expense to have it shipped back to England. It was a done deal. Soon, in September 1911, the aircraft, was shipped to a paddock near Penrith railway station where Macdonald oversaw the machine's assembly. Before flying could really get going, the aircraft and the tent were wrecked in a windstorm. No matter, Billy Hart, with his brother, Jack, as well as Macdonald, Coles and friends, salvaged the engine and rebuilt the timber frames in Billy's father's timberyard.

MacDonald stayed around to teach / demonstrate the art of flying to Billy Hart. MacDonald delayed his leaving Australia until Billy Hart had succeeded in qualifying his flying licence. The British and Colonial Co. had work for MacDonald to do in India before his return to England. There were plans that MacDonald might become a flight instructor in a future Melbourne Flying School.

You could argued that Macdonald made all the difference in Australian flying history. MacDonald had all the recent state of the art knowledge on how to set up a flying machine and all the things that are required for a landing field. If there was no MacDonald, then there wouldn't have been an aviator Bill Hart.

## **Macdonald's Machine Recovered.**

*Flight Magazine - 8 Feb 1913*

Just before midnight on Tuesday, two Gravesend fishermen, who had spent some time in dragging the river, located the Vickers biplane which sunk in the river of Erith on January 13<sup>th</sup>.

Eventually the wreck was beached at Crayford Ness; the wings were gone, and the tail was broken, probably by the action of the water. We understand that an examination by Mr Lowe, of Messrs. Vickers, Ltd., Aviation Department, showed that all the engine values were intact, and the engine was practically undamaged except for slight deflections which would arise from contact with the bed of the river.

**All the tail control wires were intact.**

The left pin of each safety belt had been released.

The bodies of Mr. Macdonald and Mr. England had not been recovered up to the time of going to Press.

One of the best accounts of the 1913 Vickers River Thames crash was given by a South Australian Newspaper in a reprint from an English paper. The article has more detail, especially as it went to print a month later, than the earlier sketchy news just days after the fatal accident. It gives a deeper understanding about passenger Harry England. His family weren't as lucky as MacDonald's family, as Harry's body was never recovered.

*Express and Telegraph (Adelaide) - p4 -19 February 1913*

## TWO AVIATORS DROWNED

### AEROPLANE DROPS INTO THAMES

#### MECHANIC'S ATTEMPT TO SWIM ASHORE

Two more British aviators have paid the price of attaining experience with their lives. The latest victims are Leslie MacDonald, 22, engineer, and Harry England, 26, mechanic, both of whom, while testing a biplane near Erith, fell with their craft into the Thames and were drowned (says an English paper). **Only a short time previously they had been singing merrily aloft.** MacDonald and England, who were engaged in the aviation department of Messrs. Vickers Ltd. left the testing ground at Joyce Green, near Erith, on a new Vickers' biplane, fitted with a 70 h.p. Gnome engine. The day was calm and bright, and a gentle wind was blowing from the south-east. The direction taken was across the river, which at this point is from three-quarters of a mile wide, towards the Essex shore. All appears to have gone well until the aviators were within 200 yards or so from the northern bank of the river, when the machine was seen to be heading downwards, as though the pilot had either decided on executing a vol-plane or had lost control of the machine. Whatever the cause, it was evident to eyewitnesses that the biplane was flying dangerously low. In a few seconds it suddenly planed down, as the engine touched the water there, as said by some, to have been a loud explosion. Both men were strapped in their seats, and one of them, who is believed to have been MacDonald, was unable to release himself, and sank with the biplane to the bottom of the river. (Checking the wreckage, it was found that pin had been released on both of their seat belts -Ed).

His companion, England, was able to extricate himself, and even to climb to the top of the machine. But the insecurity of his position was at once apparent, for the biplane was rapidly sinking beneath the surface of the water. As it disappeared from view, he struck out for the Kent shore, but after covering about a dozen yards he also sank. Among the witnesses of the tragedy were several bargemen, who were on the Kent shore, near the Thames Ammunition Works. Immediately they saw what had happened they put off in two rowing boats lying near their barges, in the hope of being able to render assistance to the man who was seen swimming towards them. Before they had made much progress, however, the aviator got into difficulties and sank. The task of the would-be rescuers was a difficult one, as the spot where the machine fell into the water was some three-quarters of a mile from them. The accident occurred about an hour and a half before high tide, when a strong current was setting up the river in a westerly direction. The river police were soon upon the scene, but after five hours arduous work with the drags they were unable to discover either the bodies of the two unfortunate men or the position of the aeroplane on the riverbed. Late at night a cap and a muffler were found in the river, which are supposed to have belonged to one of the dead men.

Mr. H.G. Ticehurst, manager of the Thames Ammunition Works at Erith, who saw the ill-fated machine just as it had dived into the water, through his telescope from the conning tower at the works said:

“I was sitting in my office, where I had a commanding view of the aviation grounds of Messrs. Vickers Limited. I noticed the machine rise to a height of about 100 ft., and then gradually volplane into the Thames, and strike the water about 200 yards or so from the Essex shore. Just as it struck the water, or was about to strike the water, I am not sure which, there was a loud explosion. I secured my telescope immediately, and went to the conning tower, from which can be obtained an excellent view of the river. I sighted the telescope on the machine, which by this time was in the water, tail up. Almost immediately I saw a man endeavour to climb up the left wing of the machine. His action must have caused the biplane to sink more rapidly, for in about two minutes the machine had disappeared entirely. The man left the biplane and started to swim towards my works, his idea, no doubt, being to try to reach two rowing boats which had put off from some barges soon after the disaster occurred. He sank before the boats could get anywhere near him.

The boatmen tried their best to rescue him, but they were too late, being handicapped by the fact that they had to row against the stream, and there was a fast current. I saw nothing of the second man; he must have gone down with the machine. My idea is that he was injured by the explosion, and consequently could not leave his seat. I suppose not more than five minutes have elapsed from the time I saw the machine rise in the air till it descended to the water.”

Leslie MacDonald, although only 22, had considerable experience as an aviator. He was trained by the British and Colonial Aeroplane Company when that company started at Bristol three years ago, and after spending some time there went to Australia, where for 12 months he did a considerable amount of flying. He was entered by the company to compete for the £10,000 prize for the flight around England 18 months ago, but, owing to his absence abroad, another pilot was engaged to steer the company's machine. He returned to England a year ago and had since done a considerable amount of flying at Brooklands and Salisbury Plain. He was engaged as a tester at Messrs. Vickers works. He was a younger son of Mr. James MacDonald, of Bristol. Mr. Harry England was well experienced in aviation. He took to flying about two years ago, and since that time had manifested a deep interest in everything connected with this new form of science. He learnt his trade as a fitter in the Cyfarthfa Works, South Wales, subsequently going to Mr. Parfitt's engineering works at Merthyr. He left the district to take up a position at Southampton, where he interested himself in the study of airmanship. After leaving Southampton he was engaged for some time with Mr. Thomas Sopwith, the well-known aviator, as a mechanic and pilot, and accompanied Mr. Sopwith to the United States where a number flying exhibitions were given. Mr. England had a proud distinction of being selected by Mr. Sopwith to act as mechanic and pilot when the latter gave a command exhibition before his Majesty the King.

Flight Magazine – 1 March 1913

## Funeral of Mr. Macdonald.

On Wednesday of last week, the Thames gave up the body of Mr. Leslie Macdonald, who was drowned in the accident on 12<sup>th</sup> (correction 13<sup>th</sup> – Ed) and the remains were taken from Gravesend to Bristol in a motor funeral car on Sunday last. The funeral took place at Canford Cemetery, Bristol, on Monday, and besides the relatives and friends was attended by representatives of Vickers, Ltd., and the British and Colonial Aeroplane Co. All mourners were conveyed to the cemetery in motor landaulettes (a car body style where the rear passengers are covered by a convertible top – Ed), which, with the motor funeral car, were provided by the Bristol Tramways and Carriage Co.

At the inquest held at Gravesend on the 21<sup>st</sup> ult., a verdict of accidentally drowned was returned. According to the expert evidence it appeared probable that the accident was caused by the lubricating oil freezing, and so leading to the seizing up of the engine.

### Another Newspaper Report

“... (funeral) took place at Canford Cemetery yesterday afternoon. The remains were brought to Bristol from Gravesend in a closed motor hearse on Sunday, and it was thoroughly a motor funeral. The deceased aviator, who was only 22 years of age, was a former Bristol Cathedral School boy, and many of his old schoolmates attended the ceremony. The Bristol and Colonial Aeroplane Company was also well represented. There were dozens of wreaths, amongst them being one from the Bristol Cathedral Old Boys' Society with the words, 'In loving memory of Leslie Falconer MacDonald, a martyr to science'.”

(Item 45 – Bristol Archives, UK.)

## THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS, FEB. 15, 1913, -212

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### AERIAL HISTORY MADE AND MAKING: 'PLANES PAST AND PRESENT.

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Photo. Illustrations Bureau.

**GRIM RELIC OF AN AVIATION TRAGEDY, THE REMAINS OF MR. L. F. MACDONALD'S  
AEROPLANE,  
LOST IN THE THAMES WITH PILOT AND MECHANIC, AND RECENTLY RECOVERED BY  
GRAVESEND FISHERMEN.**

It will be recalled that Mr. L.F. MacDonald and his mechanic, Harry England, fell with their aeroplane into the Thames at Long Reach on January 13, and were both drowned before help could reach them. The remains of the machine were recovered, a mile further upstream, by some fishermen of Gravesend on February 5, but neither of the bodies were found. The machine, which was under water when discovered, was beached on the Essex shore. The men who found it receive a reward of £50.

(Item 41- Bristol Archives, UK.)

## **The Public Safety and accidents Investigation Committee**

REPORT ON THE FATAL ACCIDENT TO MR. L.F. MACDONALD AND MR. HARRY ENGLAND WHEN FLYING OVER THE RIVER THAMES NEAR PURFLEET, ON MONDAY 13<sup>TH</sup>, 1913.

Mr. L.F. MacDonald, with Mr. Harry England, a mechanic, flying on a Vickers biplane, fitted with a 70h.p, Gnome engine, was making a trial flight from the Vickers' trial ground, near Erith, on Monday, January 13<sup>th</sup> 1913, at 3.30 p.m. After leaving the ground the aircraft headed towards the river, which is situated about 1,300 yards from the starting place. The aircraft went partly across the river, turned left, and descended slowly on to the water. The aircraft sank, and both men were drowned.

From the consideration of this evidence the Committee regards the following facts as clearly established: -

1. The aircraft was built in December 1912.
2. There was practically no wind at the time of the accident.
3. The flight lasted less than three minutes, during the latter part of which aircraft was flying slowly.
4. When over the river, which at this point is about half a mile wide, and within 200 yards of the opposite shore, the aircraft, after turning to the left, went a hundred yards or so up the river, descending slowly.
5. The aircraft rose momentarily when over the middle of the river.
6. When the aircraft alighted on the water the engine was running, and the propeller broke on touching the water.
7. After alighting, the aircraft sank gradually, not being designed to float. It took two minutes to disappear.
8. The quick release belts supplied by the firm were used by both men.
9. One man sank with the aircraft and the other sank close to it.

OPINION: The Committee is of the opinion that the accident was primarily due to a low altitude over the river being attempted when the engine was not working properly. Whilst crossing the river, and on turning, the pilot was unable to prevent the aircraft from descending gradually on to the water.

RECOMMENDATION: The risk that is run by a pilot in persevering in a flight with a faulty engine has already been drawn attention to in the Committee's report on the fatal accident to Lieut. Parke, R.N., at Wembley, on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1912, and this further accident adds additional emphasis to the danger. This flight, in that it was affected over water at low altitude, demanded additional precaution.

When flights over water are habitually attempted, precautionary measures should always be taken, either the aircraft itself should be capable of floating for a reasonable time, or alternately the men should wear, or have available, some appliance for keeping them afloat until rescued.

*(Item 44 – Bristol Archives, UK.)*

While Bill Hart was in hospital, after his "fall" in his monoplane, he had time to write to everyone. We find from the following letter to Leslie MacDonald we find out ...

1. MacDonald's nick name is "Mac". Another letter from R.H. Barnwell to MacDonald addresses him as "Mac" as well.
2. Mono is slang for monoplane.
3. "What do you think of the mono?" This must refer to Mac's mono not referring to the one that Hart was building.
4. Hart doesn't mention his big win in the Aerial Race against 'Wizard Stone' just four months ago – may have run out of space to write or more likely concussion has set his thinking back.
5. Hart keeps up to date by reading the overseas papers – aviation section.
6. Hart corresponding with MacDonald means they have built up a friendship. Hart addressed this letter gram to Vickers House School (Vickers must have crossed this address out and forwarded it to "The Blue Bird – Brooklands - Weybridge". Hart had to have known through from previous letters that Mac had left the Bristol & Colonial Co... When MacDonald left Australia, he went to India on behalf of the B & B Co., so Mac must have written to Hart with his change in postal address.

Sydney

Oct 24, 1912.

Dear Mac,

See by the papers you are doing some good flying on a "mono". I have had a lot of flying here and built a beautiful mono and fitted the Gnome to it.

I had a lot of flights and unfortunately had a bad smash a few weeks ago and am still in hospital. Drs. Pulled me through and I am leaving and will be walking in six weeks they say. Broke both legs and severely fractured my skull and concussion of brain and other injuries.

They did not expect to pull me through, but I am now getting on all right and will be flying again in a few weeks I expect. All's well that ends well.

Trust you are getting on OK and doing well for yourself. What do you think of the mono?

Regards,  
Yours sincerely,  
W.E. Hart

Sydney  
Oct 24 1912

Dear Mac

See by the papers you are doing some good flying on a mono. I have had a lot of flying here and built a beautiful mono and fitted the Gnome to it. I had a lot of flights and unfortunately had a bad smash a few weeks ago and am still in hospital. Drs. pulled me through and I am leaving and will be walking in 6 weeks they say. Broke both legs and severely fractured my skull and concussion of brain and other injuries. They did not expect to pull me through but I am now getting on all right and will be flying again in a few weeks I expect. All's well that ends well. Trust you are getting on OK and doing well for yourself. What do you think of the mono.

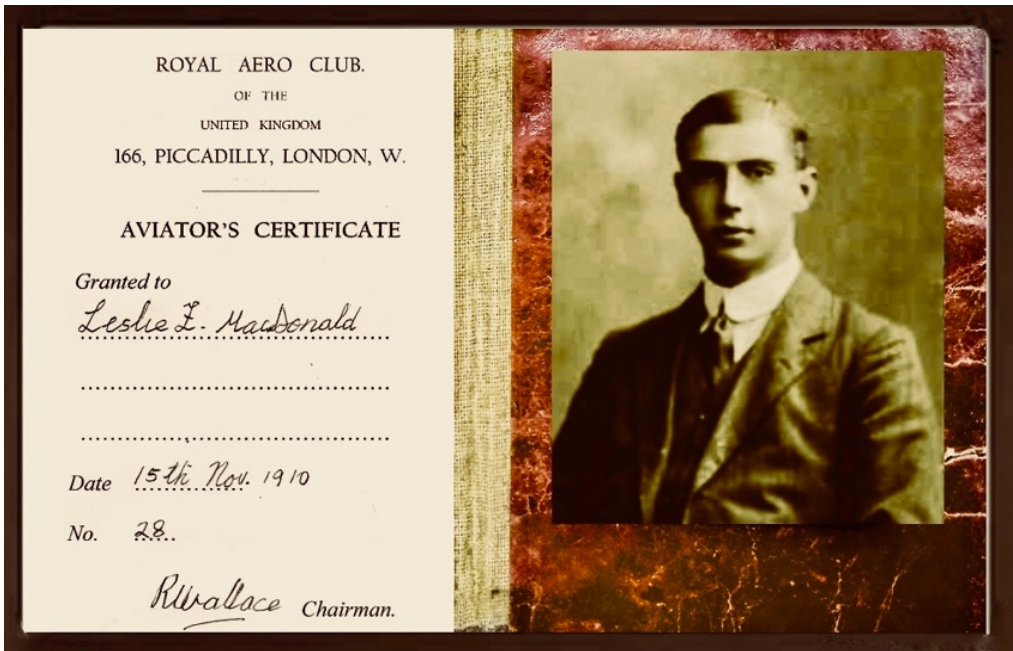
Regards  
Yours sincerely  
W.E. Hart

**Letter gram (24 Oct 1912) to MacDonald from Hart while he was still in hospital  
(Item 61- Bristol Archive, UK.)**





ID Card – (Item 49 - Bristol Archive, UK.)



Reproduction of Aviator's certificate – (Item 48 - Bristol Archive, UK.)



## CHAPTER 26

**BONUS – WILLIAM EWART HART INTERVIEWED – TALKS ABOUT SAFETY AND THE FUTURE IN AEROPLANING BUT MOST ALL HE DISPLAYS HIS SENSE OF HUMOUR**

Globe (Sydney) - p3 - Saturday - 9 August 1913

### **FLYING IS SAFE, SAYS AVIATOR HART**

**GOOD MEN COME TO GRIEF THROUGH TAKING TOO MANY RISKS**

**ANYONE COULD PILOT AN AEROPLANE AFTER A FEW LESSONS**

“Another airman killed,”

Thus, runs the heading to a cable message, sometimes daily, at any rate once a week, to be seen in the columns of the Press.

There must be some grave danger in flying. With an idea to find out where the danger lay, Mr. W.E. Hart, the Australian aviator, was interviewed.

“Aviation!” said Mr. Hart in a jocular tone. “Have you come to the right place? I am a dentist.”

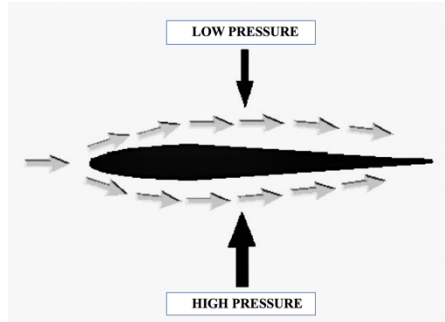
“So, I judged from the brass plate on the door, and also certain ominous looking instruments of torture I perceive here,” replied a Press representative.



*An older Bill Hart, the flying dentist. — Illustrated by Harry Campbell  
(The Wireless Weekly – p6 -30 Aug 1939)*

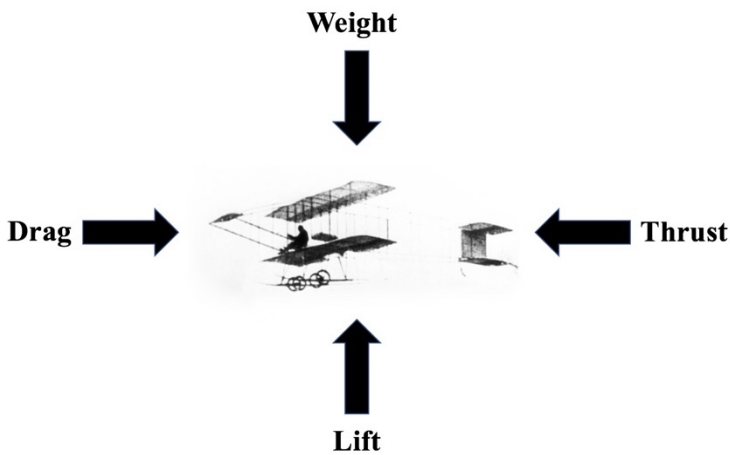
“But Australia’s pioneer aviator is far too well known to disguise himself so easily. Besides, those pictures on the wall disclose the secret immediately, so, if you please, we - the reading public - would like your views on flying generally: how it’s done, what it feels like, and how accidents may be guarded against.”

“Well,” said Mr. Hart. “to deal with how flying in an aeroplane is done, I might say there is good deal of misconception in the public mind concerning the difficulties of flying. It really is a very simple matter. It just amounts to this: If you take a sheet of fairly stiff cardboard, or anything else which serves to represent a ‘plane’ or wing of a flying machine, bend it a trifle, and then force it horizontally through the air, it has a tendency to rise. **That is the secret of the aeroplane.**”



*A curved and thick leading wing edge will give you lift*

It has two similar broad surfaces, with a powerful engine and a big aerial propeller. The engine drives the propeller, which drags the aeroplane along, and when it attains a certain speed -say, 20 miles an hour – it has nothing else to do but to rise into the air. To make it ascend or descend when off the ground there is a tail or rudder. This can be moved with the aid of levers by the aviator.



*For flight you need the careful balance of four physical forces: lift, drag, weight and thrust.*

“Contrary to the general belief, when the aviator desires to rise he does not depress his rudder, but turns it upwards, which has the effect of lowering the tail, thereby pointing the front of the aeroplane upwards. The effect is to offer a bigger resistance to the air and the machine climbs in consequence. In addition, the aviator can, by moving his levers in various directions, ‘trim’ his ship, as it were.

“With a little practice, anybody of average intelligence and average courage can learnt to fly in a short time, and, once you have learnt the actions of controlling an aeroplane, they become instinctive as those of steering and balancing a bicycle. **It simply becomes impossible to do the wrong thing**, and what causes an accident is the collapse of some part of the machine through either unperceived defect, carelessness in preparation, or an error in judgement such as trying to turn at too sharp an angle. The latter causes many upsets, for the machine ‘banks,’ that is, gets one wing much higher than the other, an unexpected gust of wind catches and overbalances it, and down it falls.

“I lately read an article by that prominent **British aviator, Mr. C. Graham-White**, in the ‘English Review,’ in which he gives some interesting particulars concerning the perils of the air, with which I largely agree, though my experience leads me to differ from him in one or two details. As he says, the first aeroplane had to be built without any knowledge of what strains the frames might be called upon to meet. So long as the machine was travelling at a given speed through still air, the strains could be calculated and guarded against, but such abnormal perils as sudden alteration in air pressure, causing the machine to drop a number of feet without warning, could only be discovered by experience. Nowadays, however, these things are all found out, and the majority of aeroplanes of approved design are fit for use by any person with a little training, provided he does not take reckless or unnecessary risks. A very noticeable fact in connection with the fatalities of the past twelve months is that over 75 per cent, occurred to professional and proved good fliers, **whilst very few of the beginners get hurt**. (Bill Hart’s statement here, is said with the knowledge that his flight trainer, Leslie MacDonald, had died 7 months earlier in a plane crash -Ed)

This is easily accounted for, as, for the beginners, aviation holds unknown dangers, and consequently they are very careful, and do not attempt risky flights in bad weather. The professionals, however, get so used to flying that they think no more of going up on a dangerous day than the ordinary person does entering a tramcar. They are so used to their machines that they lose the sense of danger, and consequently take unnecessary risks, too frequently paying a bitter price for their over-confidence.

“I can say with confidence that I could fly for the next 20 years without accident, if I could make up my mind to go in for safe flights only - that is, flying only when the weather conditions are perfect, and over perfect flying country. Perfect flying country would have plenty of good landing places, where an aeroplane may come down almost anywhere.

“The modern aeroplane is made to fly and will do so provided atmospheric conditions are reasonably good, and the ordinary person, who would shudder to look down from a height of 100ft, can, with a little experience, complacently gaze down 5000 feet from an aeroplane without the slightest feeling of dizziness. This is very hard to account for. In my own case, if I look down from the G.P.O. tower I feel slightly giddy, but I have been up 6700ft in my aeroplane without any uneasy feelings at all. I think it must be the feelings of confidence that the machine is under control, and that one can ascend or descend at one’s own will, that sustains one.

“Again, I say there is really very little in flying. So long as the would-be aviator has just average nerves and common-sense, my experience is that both in my case and with many passengers, I have taken up, that after two or three flights one becomes quite used

to the sensation, and forgets all about the dangers, which are lost sight of. In fact, the last thing you think of is the possibility of a fall. No doubt if the aviator once got the idea into his mind that he was going to fall, he would quickly do so.

“To my mind, most of the risks in aviation are known. I would like to explain. Experience shows that the **air acts very like the ocean waves**. Some days you will find the air in long rolling billows, again, it will be in sharp choppy gusts, and occasionally it will be found perfectly calm, so much so that it is hardly necessary to move the control mechanism at all, unless it be in rising or descending. The aeroplane flies on these air-billows. You can get exactly the sensation of flying by sitting in the bow of an ordinary launch and going outside the Heads of Sydney Harbour. There you find on different days the conditions I describe - one day you will be buffeted about a lot; next day the boat is rolling on the long billows; and another day, perhaps, the sea will be calm.



**“I will try to explain to you exactly what it is like to fly in an aeroplane.** Almost everyone has learnt to ride a bicycle. Well, once the first steps are overcome aeroplaning is just as instinctive as cycling. The first two or three times it seems awfully difficult, then it all comes easy, and afterwards it is only an error of judgement or a breakage of part of the machine that causes an accident. You find yourself flying about all over the country, and thinking of anything but the machine, an all the time **instinctively operating the controlling mechanism correctly.**

“I wish to particularly point out that when you have progressed this far, it would be absolutely impossible for you to do the wrong thing. As with the bicycle, you may make errors of judgement and take unnecessary risks, but there is never the slightest danger of you doing the wrong thing with the controlling mechanism.

“I myself got quite a lot of experience and practice sitting in the front of a boat, and with it rocking and pitching imagining I was in the aeroplane and operating the controlling gear to suit.

“In flying, very strange conditions are encountered occasionally. There is the so-called air-pocket. It is not unusual to fall 20, 30 or even 50 feet in almost a sheer drop, but I never found this really dangerous. I do not mind a good, strong, steady wind, but the worst day for flying is when comes in sharp, choppy gusts. When a strong, steady wind blows, the inexperienced public thinks that it is a bad day for flying, but as a matter of fact it is very often found quite suitable. On such a day, whatever gusts strike the machine, strike the whole of it and lift it evenly, whereas on a gusty day perhaps two or three or more gusts will strike the right wing only, and will almost overbalance the machine. I have been almost upset in this way several times, and it has once or twice been only by good fortune that another gust struck the opposing wing and righted me.

“I had a most peculiar experience flying from Sydney to Richmond once. My engine was running well, but just after leaving Sydney, doing my best, I found it impossible to

get more than about 500 feet up when I wanted, for safety's sake, to ascend to 5000ft. The reason was that a strong wind was blowing off the mountains towards Sydney, and it had dipped down, following the fall of the country, and the current was too strong for the aeroplane to overcome. Presently, getting nearer the mountains, I got into the ascending current of air, and with almost startling swiftness, shot up to the height I desired, and floated there in ease and comfort until I desired to descend, when I found that the same cause was operating against me, and I had the greatest difficulty in getting back to earth.

“If when flying, the engine stops suddenly, it is a generally accepted idea that that is the end of the aviator. Not so, if he retains his presence of mind. Certainly, he cannot clamber out of his seat to go and coax it back into running again, **but he still has the power of making a ‘vol-plane,’** or gradual sweeping return to the ground, or he can land safely on the tops of trees at the cost of smashed machine. What is of far more vital importance is that none of the controls or framework of the aeroplane itself shall carry away. That means disaster.



“The aeroplane is designed to fly at a certain speed – say, 60 miles an hour. The rudders are made on this machine to control it quite it quite well at anything from 50 to 60 miles an hour, and the controls would practically lose their effect at less than 50. The faster the machine went, you can understand, the more effective the controls would be. Well, then, take this machine made to fly at 60 miles an hour, and if when in the air the engine suddenly stops you turn it down at an angle sufficient to maintain that pace for at least 50 miles an hour, and while you maintain the speed your controls are just as effective, as if you were flying. But as you are coming down an incline, it just depends on the height you are at as to how far you can travel before touching the ground. The average machine will glide about a mile for every thousand feet of altitude. Thus, if I were anywhere over Sydney at 5000 feet, I could land anywhere within a radius of five miles – either in the Harbour, Centennial Park, Botany or any other suitable landing place. But supposing I were flying at only 1000ft altitude, my landing place is limited to a mile, and the chances are I could not find a suitable spot within this area, and would be forced to land in the city, probably on some building, and meet with disaster.

“Whilst flying over fairly good country, with landing places almost everywhere, **1000ft is quite high enough;** but for the mountains or bad country it may be necessary to get up well over 5000 or 6000.

“Of course, with an aeroplane, one has to be careful to see that every part is in good working order before ascending, for if anything breaks in the air, particularly any of the control wires, the machine immediately gets out of hand, and plunges to earth. It is **much more important** to see that your control wires are sound and firm than the engine, because if these wires break you are definitely settled, whereas if the engine stops you can generally come down even on the top of trees, as I have said before, at the



price of a smashed machine. Quite a lot of fatalities are caused by the pilots subjecting their machines to excessive strains. For instance, we might say that an aeroplane's normal pace is 60 miles per hour. With the engine full out, if you were in a dive at an acute angle, you probably attain up to 90 m.p.h. There would be an increase of 50 per cent. in speed, but 500 per cent. of strain on the machine, in the event of your striking a sudden gust of wind.

"Aeroplanes are generally built with a factor of safety of about eight – that is, they are tested to stand eight times the strain they would normally be called upon for in use but sudden gusts in even ordinary flying weather may increase the strain on some parts of the plane three or four times. That is the point to emphasise – the strain may come suddenly, and only on one section of the aeroplane.

"I do not doubt that if an aviator could definitely decide to cut out all unnecessary risks, flying is fairly safe; but of course, it is hard to abjure (reject -Ed) risks. Generally, after a little experience, one becomes less apprehensive, and is not satisfied with fair weather flying. Continual use of the machine engenders the feeling that one could not possibly have a fall.

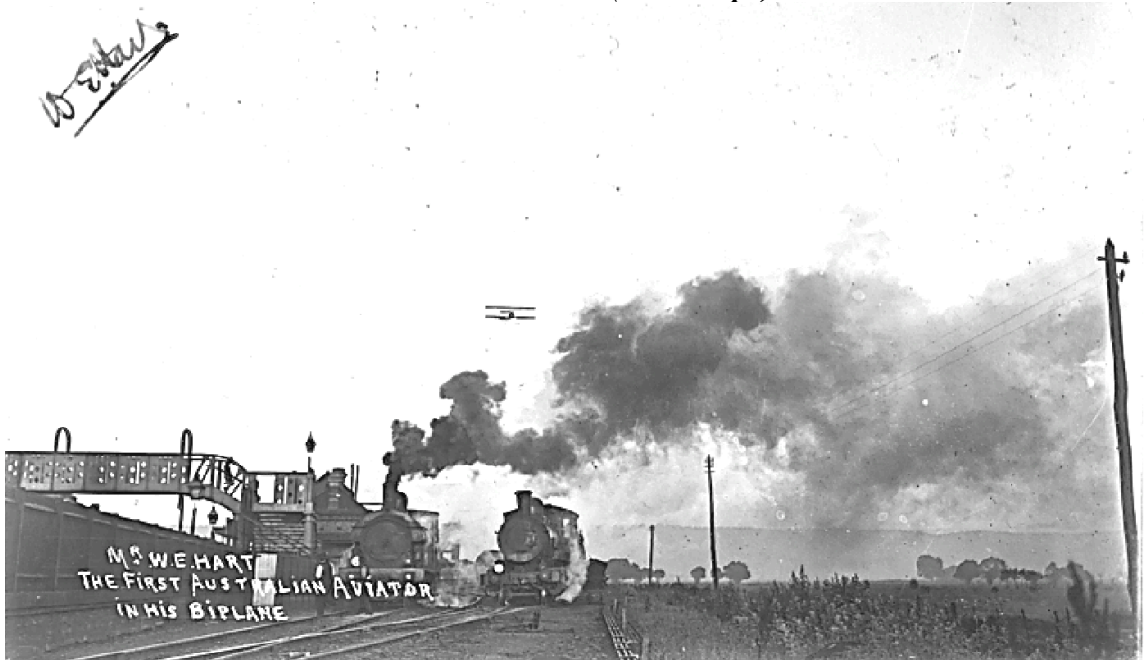
"In flying particularly, the onlooker sees most of the game. No doubt most people have at one time or another ridden a restive (edgy - Ed) horse and have taken a chance of being thrown. I venture to say they never once thought they were going to be, although the onlookers expected it to happen every moment. The same thing applies with an aeroplane. There you are on the machine, trying to control it, and the possibility of a fall never enters your head. All the same, the people on the ground may expect every moment to see you turn turtle and come down - smash! I may say that I have never once thought, even before an actual smash, that an accident was going to happen, and am quite satisfied that if ever when up in the air I had thought I was going to fall I would have done so quickly. Still, when I see cinematographs taken of myself flying, I become **quite excited and almost nervous**, thinking every minute to see a picture of the aeroplane tumbling through space. The fact of being so busy controlling probably accounts for the action of an aeroplane not being so terrifying to the man on board as to the people beneath.

"I have had some most peculiar experiences with passengers, although I have never yet had one up with me who was really frightened. I have had quite a number who have arranged to take a flight, put their foot on the machine, and **decided to stick to mother earth**, in many cases after travelling long distances for the special purpose of having a flight. Many passengers I have taken got very nervous when they started, but that felling has invariably quickly worn off, after seeing what perfect control one has over an aeroplane. Ladies, particularly, I have found good passengers. An experience one of my passengers crowded into his short 10 minutes' flight is worth relating.

"On this occasion, a couple of Press photographers had me to come down low over Penrith station, where a couple of locomotives were standing, pouring out lots of smoke. I had flown around the river, and forgot I had a passenger on board, and, when almost over the station at altitude of about 1200ft, suddenly remembered the newspaper men waiting underneath. **I dived down very quickly into the smoke**, and when about 100ft from the ground the passenger came back to my recollection. Turning around, I

apologised for forgetting him, and offered to continue the flight. He very promptly declined, however, saying he was quite satisfied he had his money's worth. "I have not only had a flight, but all the sensations of a fall thrown in," he added; "In fact, I'm not sure whether I'm still alive, or just dreaming this in the next world now." He, however, concluded that that he was glad to have had the experience even of the falling, without the smash, but did not want a repetition.

*9 November 1911- (The Sun-p1)*



*W.E. Hart, the Australian aviator, accompanied by Mr. H. Russell Crane, flying over Penrith Railway Station this morning.*

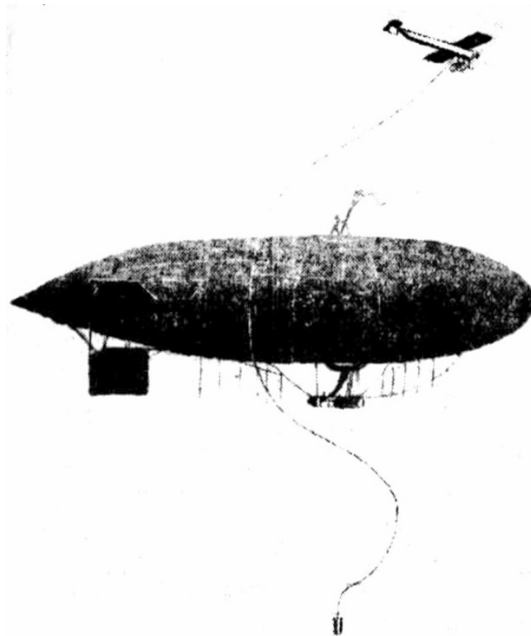
"Although I have undertaken about 250 passenger flights, I have only actually had one fall with a passenger, and that was on occasion when I was persuaded against my own judgement. I never went up on risky days with a passenger, as I felt in a great measure responsible for his safety; but I have had eight or nine spills myself, from 10 to 40 feet in height, without any great damage being done, excepting to the machine, until my big smash.

"Regarding the **future of aviation, and its possibilities**, I think the present type of flying machine is almost as perfect as it is possible to get it. Note that I say the present type, and if there is to be any future for the aeroplane commercially, an entirely new type will certainly have to be evolved. This may be lit upon any day. The present type machine is all right for sport, and military purposes, particularly the latter, as there is no doubt that for reconnoitring in future warfare, the aeroplane will be indispensable. I have no great faith in the dirigible, and consider that a couple of modern aeroplanes, on account of their superior mobility, could easily destroy the best dirigible that has been

built. They could rise so quickly and could get over the top of the dirigible, whose crew in the little car swung under the huge gas balloon, would be unable to see them.

“Aerial warfare will no doubt be between skirmishing and scouting parties of aeroplanes, and the side which can destroy its opponent’s air fleet will hold the advantage, inasmuch as it will have the machines for reconnaissance. It would be **impossible to invade a country by aeroplane**, as there is hardly enough ground in the whole of England for an enemy to land sufficient aeroplanes to carry a small army, even if the supply of ’planes was large enough to do so.

*(Just two years later, Bill Hart was proven correct as aeroplanes, where they could, attacked enemy dirigibles – Ed)*



*Warfare in the air - (The Argus - p5 -10 Oct 1914)*

“Concerning my big spill, from which I am thankful to say I have now completely recovered, there is one peculiar thing about it – that it has completely wiped the recollection of one day from my mind. Of course, as you know, I was unconscious for 10 days after the fall, (Hart’s monoplane “fell” out of the sky from 200 feet – Ed), but what is hard to understand is that I have no knowledge of the doings of any part of that day of the accident itself. I am told that I slept at Richmond the night before; had several flights before breakfast, played billiards in the forenoon, and had a couple of flights after lunch before the one which ended so disastrously. I don’t remember anything about these actions. All I know after the day before is waking up in bed and finding Doctors Kearney and Hinder standing beside me. I asked who was sick, and was not convinced that I was, and that I was in the hospital until I found I could not move. I scorned the idea that I had a smash in the aeroplane and took a lot of convincing that it was a fact,

and even now, except for the evidence of my illness and a few scars still left. I could easily believe that no smash had taken place.

“Aeroplaning is not the only form of flying in which I have experience, as I have no doubt a certain country member of the police force could tell you. I was motoring at something over the speed limit one day from one town to another, being in haste to keep a professional engagement, when the man in blue sternly barred the way, and in response to my query as to why he had stopped me he remarked that I was going too fast. (May I point out to the reader, at this juncture, that W.E. Hart came in second place in the Goulburn to Sydney motor race – *The Cumberland Argus* - p11 - 30 Sept 1911 - Ed) ‘Fifteen miles an hour is the legal limit,’ he added; ‘but you were miles over that. Why, you were flying!’ ‘Well, I have a licence!’ I replied. ‘A licence to drive the car; but not for the pace you were going. You were just flying,’ he repeated. ‘Oh! Yes, I have a licence, I said again, handing my aviator’s ‘ticket’ to him. Robert stiffly took it, but presently his sense of humour overcame his official dignity, and ‘Be off!’ he said, as he returned the certificate. **There was no prosecution.**

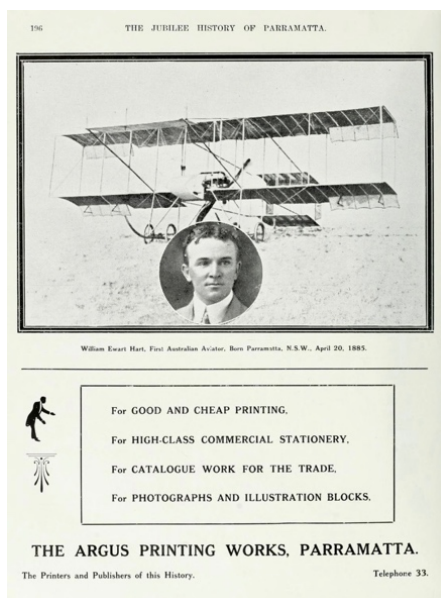
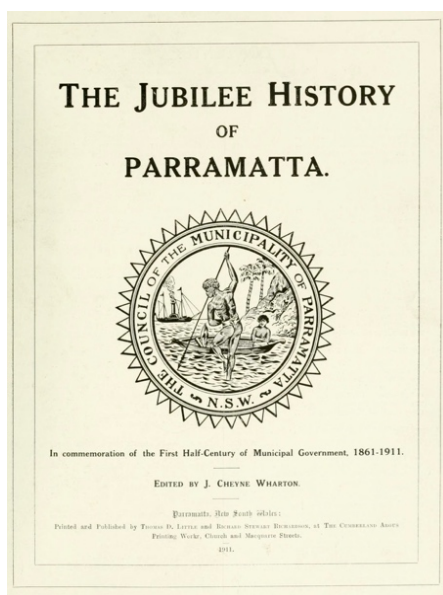
“Constantly travelling in the country as I do, I frequently come in contact with people, entirely unknown to me, who assert they are intimately with ‘Hart, the aviator.’ In fact, some of them claim not only to know me, but also my wife, although, personally, I have not the pleasure of the lady’s acquaintance myself yet. Recently on a train trip an entire stranger engaged me in conversation, and presently mentioned how well he knew Billy Hart, and he had, in fact, been at school with him. He had, he said, accompanied Billy on many flights, and was with him on the day of his smash. In fact, it was only an extraordinary piece of luck that prevented him from going up in the last disastrous flight, and after helping to pick me up he saw me into the hospital, where he was a regular daily visitor. He was quite impressive in his way of telling it, and he described the sensation of flying with a wealth of detail. I could not resist the temptation to draw him out. Nearing my destination, I capped the joke by remarking that I could not place him at all. ‘No,’ he said. ‘You and I have never met!’

‘Well, you see,’ I told him, ‘my name happens to be Hart!’ Tableau!”



## A PUZZLE SOLVED

I have solved a puzzle that has perplexing me for a while, a puzzle that's over a century old. The editorial staff who produced the Parramatta Jubilee Book, in **December 1911**, made an image of Billy Hart, their local hero, with a Boxxkite biplane. They found a photo of any Boxxkite and then stuck Billy headshot on it. It was a mock-up photo - years ahead of photoshop. Therefore, Billy never had a cowling on his plane. Billy did comment that the wind would blow through his legs to his face – a cowling would have fixed this problem and would have reduced drag. However, photos of the air race later in June 1912 show that he never used a biplane with a cowling on it.





I found this photo, seen above, on the Internet. It is that of Boxkite No.12A, i.e. the 13<sup>th</sup> on the production line. It's the same photo and same angle of the photo as the one used in the Jubilee Book. It shows us that journalists can be inventive. This plane never came to Australia. It was lent to Oscar Morison to do exhibition flying especially around Brighton, UK. The mocked-up photo appears on page 196. This is the last page before the Index. I feel that a half page ad was taken out and our local hero was inserted. This tells me is that it was a last-minute decision.





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I wish to thank Peter Gibbs, who is a journalist, researcher and poet. He resides in Clevedon, near Bristol, UK. His generous time and efforts have considerably enhance this book.

Last but not least, my gratitude to the Hart family for graciously providing materials for this book.

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